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Teaching AVID: An Investigation of Pedagogy in a College Preparatory Program for Traditionally Underserved Youth

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Teaching AVID: An Investigation of Pedagogy in A College Preparatory Program For Traditionally Underserved Youth

by

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Dissertation

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Dedication

For my husband, Tom

And my sons, Matthew and Jackson

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Teaching AVID: An Investigation of Pedagogy in a College Preparatory Program for Traditionally Underserved Youth

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2004

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This dissertation describes a program designed to increase access to advanced courses and increase college attendance rated for underrepresented students. Specifically, this dissertation looks at how three practitioners implement principles of the program while still maintaining their individual identities as teachers. My study fills a void in the lack of available qualitative studies of this particular program. Chapter One situates my work within the framework of other research focused on improving the schooling experiences of students of color. Chapter Two discusses multicultural education and culturally relevant teaching as precursors to the existence of programs and teaching methodologies specific to students of color. This chapter also introduces the program I studied, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). Chapter Three describes the methodological approaches I used to study AVID and its teachers, and provides a background of the school site where I conducted my work. Chapter Four discusses the AVID program, its history, structure, and goals, and introduces three primary principles

that exist in each of its classrooms. Chapters Five, Six, and Seven introduce my research participants and demonstrate how a program functions differently within three separate classrooms. Chapter Eight further illuminates each participant's unique pedagogical response to a tragic event that occurred on the campus. This chapter also discusses the implications of my study, ideas for future research in the area of improving school experiences for students of color.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

MY FOCUS

What are we as a society, and particularly we as teachers, to do about the sub par education that exists for students of color? This question has been in the back of my mind since I returned to graduate school and was exposed to the glaring inequities that exist in education. Upon entering graduate school, I was forced to examine our current school system and concur with the literature and most of my professors that there is a "hidden curriculum" to which the dominant culture has access to and which students of color find difficult to discover. As I read, I concluded that the amount of work available on educating students of color (see Asante 1998; Banks, 1993; Delpit, 1992, 1995; Fine, 1991; Giroux, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2001; Ogbu, 1978 among others) pointed to the need to find ways to improve the educational experience of these students. I knew early on that my dissertation research would investigate, at some level, the unequal education that students of color receive. This dissertation study investigates a program that seeks to provide opportunities for students of color to have equal access to advanced secondary courses and to college programs.

The work of Gloria Ladson-Billings and her theory of culturally relevant

teaching inspired my search for a dissertation topic. I poured over her work and listened to almost all of her presentations at the 2002 American Educational Research Association (AERA) meeting. I was intrigued with her idea about having prospective teachers "… questioning (and preparing students to question) the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice that exist in society" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 128). Her examination of teachers who used culturally relevant pedagogy to inspire African American students to achieve in schools piqued my interest and motivated me to want to duplicate her study on a smaller level. My pilot study followed a teacher to examine whether or not she employed culturally relevant pedagogy in her classroom. This study, while interesting, did not directly lead to a dissertation question and design. Instead, what drew my interest was this teacher's involvement in a program called Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). This program interested me because I saw students actively engaged in the learning process and making steps toward attending college. The amazing part is that these are students who do not fit the typical mold of academically minded scholars. They attend a school that is not well rated and has had the threat of being closed down because of low performance rates and a high drop-out population. In essence, these kids are not expected to be doing well in school and planning for a postsecondary schooling experience. I immediately wanted to know more about the program, its teachers, and the principles that were used to implement it.

My question became this: In what ways do teachers implement pedagogy within a program designed to enhance school success and increase college attendance for students of color? My interest was not specifically focused on AVID but in the phenomenon of teachers instructing students of color in the strategies needed to do well in honors courses and in college. Several programs exist, including AVID, Gear-Up, Upward Bound, and many other local programs throughout the nation. To investigate my research question, I chose AVID as an example of one existing program that demonstrates routes to success for students of color.

My research question led to an examination of one program and three teachers that seek to stamp out the inequities in the current system. The qualitative design was chosen as a means to tell a story of three teachers and three groups of students that a quantitative design would have been unable to do. AVID was chosen over other programs because of my ability to gain entry to the research site. I knew one of the teachers and had worked at the school previously as a researcher. In addition, a significant amount of information exists on quantifiable results of AVID (see Guthrie & Guthrie, 2002; AVID, 2004). However, qualitative studies are scarce and I knew my study could contribute to the lack of available qualitative results on AVID. Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, and Lintz (1996) conducted a review of AVID, but it was focused in terms of investigating whether or not untracking practices in schools worked. These researchers

compared college enrollment of AVID students to local and national averages of students who were not enrolled in AVID. My specific focus on pedagogy within AVID demonstrates how AVID provides a framework for implementation without being formulaic and how each teacher is able to bring who he or she is as a human and teacher to the teaching-learning interaction.

This study adds to the lengthy amount of research available on teacher pedagogy; however, my research is unique in that it presents a first look at multiple teachers of AVID within the same school and how they implement a program and enact it within three very different classrooms. I tell the stories of how each instructor brings who he or she is as a person to the teaching- learning encounter. My review of the literature emphasized that "interaction between educators and students is another vital cultural process that produces inequality " (Mehan et al., 1996, p. 228). One previous work on AVID portrayed the work of the AVID founder, Mary Catherine Swanson in terms of her life and the process by which she created AVID (Freedman, 2000). There exists a journal, *Access*, which is dedicated to stories of AVID teachers and students, but again, these do not paint a portrait of AVID principles and individual pedagogy as my work does. Most studies point to AVID effectiveness in quantitative terms, highlighting academic success and increased college attendance rates, but few tell stories of real teachers and their students in the AVID classroom. Additional study on AVID is important because "… there has not been much systematic research

conducted on the efforts to reform the tracking system…. There have not been as many detailed investigations of actual detracking practices" (Mehan et al., 1996, p. 17). It is important to examine and document practices that are succeeding in making education opportunities more equitable for all. This study also serves to provide a model of how individual teachers adapt AVID to meet the needs of their particular schools and students, a study Mehan et al. (1996) suggests is worth pursuing. I will now present an outline of my dissertation chapters, provide a rationale for my study, introduce terms that will be demonstrated within the data chapters, and conclude with a section on why research on AVID is important.

DISSERTATION OUTLINE

My dissertation investigates a program that seeks to provide opportunities for students from underserved populations to enroll in advanced courses and prepare those students for college success. Chapter One introduces my research question: In what ways do teachers implement pedagogy within a program designed to enhance school success and increase college attendance for students of color? This chapter also places my work within the framework of research focused on improving school experiences for students of color. Chapter One continues by describing the chapters within the dissertation, providing a justification for the study, defining guiding terms, and concludes with an explanation of why my work is significant.

Chapter Two offers an in-depth literature review, discussing multicultural education and culturally relevant practices that have attempted to include students of color within pedagogy and curriculum and not simply to represent the dominant culture. I focus on these two issues because I believe their existence led to the ability of a program like AVID to be born. I then briefly introduce the AVID program and how it relates to these previous reform efforts.

Chapter Three describes the methodology that directed this work. I gathered data over a period of five months in three different classrooms using investigative tactics of observation and interviews. Data were analyzed using open coding and identifying common themes used within each classroom. In addition, a second round of coding was employed to discover what, if any, pedagogical strategies were used which differentiated the teachers' practices from one another. Chapter Three also provides information on the school district, history of the school, and detailed descriptions of the setting, both the school building and the individual classrooms. This chapter concludes with a brief look at the limitations of my study and design.

Chapter Four illuminates the AVID program, providing information on the history and dissemination of the program. I provide a description of the goals of the program and how schools can create AVID in classrooms. Finally, I briefly introduce my participants and their ability to practice three elements of AVID,

writing, inquiry, and collaboration, that are hallmarks of the program and discuss how each teacher enacts these within his or her classroom.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven begin my data chapters and provide a detailed description of each teacher and his or her practice. These chapters allow the reader to "meet" the individual teachers, learn their nuances, and become familiar with some of their philosophies about teaching. I refer back to my guiding terms, or themes, introduced in Chapter One and demonstrate how these are manifested in each classroom. In addition, I differentiate each teacher's practice by focusing on pedagogy that is unique to each practice. As a result of this design, three models of AVID are offered representing the fact that it is not formulaic, but rather open to various levels of interpretation and practice.

Chapter Eight would not have existed except for the fact that an event occurred during my study that affected my work significantly. As a result, I could not present this work without its inclusion. This chapter describes a tragic event at the high school and its effects on the teachers in my study. A student was murdered in the hallways of Regis, a boyfriend killing his girlfriend because she broke up with him. This incident occurred after school on a Friday and many students witnessed it. This event allowed me to further demonstrate that AVID is a program that allows teachers to engage in practices which respond to the needs of their students based on their experience and relationship with these young people.

Within Chapter Eight, I also make suggestions for future research and remark on the implications of my study, including its use for other practitioners of AVID and those who seek to study programs which attempt to bridge the educational divide between White students and students of color. Having outlined my chapters, I will now turn my attention to depicting the current educational climate under which the AVID teachers on whom I focus work.

The historical and current climate in education is one in which most students of color are educated in schools separate from White students, or at least in separate classes using tracking as a means of separation (McLaren, 1989; Tatum, 1997). The result of this separation has been a system of unequal resources and opportunities for students of color when compared to White students. This fact can be verified by looking at most school systems and seeing where the low performance schools are; typically, they exist in an area of town with a high population of students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Attempts by education experts to fix the problem have been to track students by ability level or label them as at-risk and then proceed to teach them in a different manner than White students, usually with low expectations and few challenges (Mehan et al., 1996). AVID fights against this trend by teaching its students with high expectations and providing the tools needed to succeed in academia.

Public school teachers in the United States do their work within an environment that by its nature reproduces existing hierarchies of society. Schools

habitually distribute the values and norms of the dominant culture (Giroux, 1983b). AVID provides a means to have students attain the cultural and social capital needed for success in schools. My participants, in essence, become the means by which these values are transmitted, a role that is often filled in upper-class White families by students' parents. This study is undertaken in an attempt to understand the role of the student-teacher interaction within a program designed to increase access to honors-level courses and open the doors to college campuses for students of color. My hope is that my study and similar investigations will lead to a future in which

> … a college-preparatory education is no longer conducted within a Great Wall that keeps intruders out, but rather in an inclusive classroom that teaches students from diverse cultures the abiding disciplines of inquiry and determination so that they, too, may cross the Great Divide. (Freedman, 2000, p. 409)

AVID provides access to important information for school success and has as a goal to disseminate its goals and strategies to entire schools so that all students have knowledge about how to succeed in classrooms and how to gain acceptance to college. This dissertation offers a peek into individual classrooms where this metamorphosis of pedagogy is occurring. Having discussed the current climate and what AVID hopes to accomplish, I will now introduce several terms important to the content of my study.

GUIDING TERMS

Several terms, what I call themes, emerged from my study of how teachers enact pedagogy within a program designed to enhance school performance and increase college attendance for students of color. I have chosen these particular themes as my focus because all of my participants practiced them in their classrooms. The themes are intertwined and overlapped within the teachers' practices frequently; however, I separate them out for discussion to provide greater clarity. I discuss them now to provide a common framework by which to apply the terms within the data chapters. These themes include caring, high expectations, student responsibility, flexibility, and voluntary participation. I will briefly introduce the terms and explain how each will be used within the context of my study.

Caring

Each teacher that I worked with at Regis High School had an uncanny way of putting the students before him or herself. They all seemed to exemplify caring when they stepped out of themselves and put the needs of their students first (Noddings, 1992). None of the literature on AVID or AVID training discusses caring explicitly, yet I witnessed it in each teacher during times when he or she was fully engrossed in the needs of the students. Goldstein (1997) remarks, "… Becoming involved in a mutually caring relationship with students is one of the perks of teaching young children" (p. 27). I would venture to say that this

advantage was also present in the high school classrooms where I conducted my study. I saw instances of the following:

> When the student associates with the teacher, feeling free to initiate conversation and suggest areas of interest, he or she is better able to detect the characteristic attitude even in formal, goal-oriented situations such as lectures. Then a brief contact of eyes may say, "I am still the one interested in you. All of this is of variable importance and significance, but you still matter more." (Noddings, 1984, p. 20)

All three teachers had classrooms in which students had a voice in the content and context of lessons. Additionally, the teachers spent individual time with students and provided a forum for them to be heard. The data chapters will describe examples of caring encounters in each teacher's classroom while keeping in mind that there exists no universal definition of caring. "Caring encounters, then, are variable in their composition and contours" (Goldstein, 2002, p. 21). The data chapters will exemplify that caring is present in each classroom, but cannot be bound by any rigid definition or constraint. Caring is intertwined closely with high expectations because teachers who truly care accept and expect nothing but the best from their students (Gay, 2000).

High Expectations

High expectations were a resounding theme in all three classrooms and an expectation of an AVID teacher. The entire program was founded on Mary Catherine Swanson's belief that

> … public schools were not raising kids up, but letting them down. This middling group of under-served students with low expectations and poor basic skills, Mary Catherine realized, would be heading by bus to Clairemont High in the fall. They needed a teacher who would challenge and support them, she believed, with the same expectations that she had [for her own child]. (Freedman, 2000, p. 30)

Thus, the program was built upon the expectation that AVID teachers would know without a doubt that their students could succeed in academically rigorous courses and in college and would prepare them to do so.

Without high expectations for students, an AVID classroom does not exist. Mehan et al. (1996) aptly writes, "AVID pulls the rug out from the assumption lurking in American education that suggests ethnic and linguistic minority kids cannot do well in college bound classes" (p. 54). In addition, the AVID training manual states, "Students must be challenged if they are to move beyond previous levels of achievement and understand the value of study skills and academic success strategies that provide the basis for instruction in AVID" (p. 49). It is not enough to be enrolled in AVID; teachers must push students to excel in college-preparatory courses. If an instructor does not inherently believe and act on the

belief that middle-level students can perform as well as honors students, AVID will fail. I saw consistent examples in each classroom of teachers who were similar in character to those in Scheurich's study on highly successful public elementary schools. These teachers

> … are fiercely committed, not just to holding high expectations for all children but for achieving high levels of success with all children. The question is not whether it can be done; the only question is how it is to be done for all…. (Sheurich, 2002, p. 170)

My participants were similar in their commitment to seeing the students in their AVID classroom succeed.

Student Responsibility

A major component of AVID is the teaching of individual responsibility; the student is given the needed tools, but must learn to meet deadlines and become self-sufficient in terms of getting assignments completed. The ideology is expressed in the Mehan (1996) book *Creating School Success*, in which he quotes an AVID coordinator as saying, " The responsibility for your success is with you. AVID is here to help. Your goal should be to go to a four-year college. There is lots of work to be done, but you will have more help, support, and love than you will ever need" (p. 140). The students in Mehan's case study reflect this philosophy when they talk about their success in AVID and how it has been a result of their hard work. Mary Catherine Swanson, in creating AVID, had a

written goal of motivating students to take responsibility for their own learning. Within training, the instructors stressed the idea that AVID's ultimate goal is for students to become independent learners, a skill they must have for college. In my study, the teachers reminded the students repeatedly that success in school and in AVID was up to them; ultimately they had to get the work done to graduate from high school and attend university.

Flexibility

Flexibility is a theme given credence in AVID training; it is essential that a teacher tailor the program to meet the needs of the students. The training manual reflects this ideology:

> It is essential that each schoolwide plan include a comprehensive professional development plan that reflects the individual needs of that school. Within AVID, we entrust the decision of the appropriate staff development to the AVID site team, bolstered by the input of the students to keep the team aware of what is or is not working for them within their school. [In addition,] … individual features of the program will evolve over time to meet the needs of changing school communities. (*Shaping the American Dream*, p. 2)

AVID is not a cookie-cutter program, but one that introduces specific elements that can be taught in any manner and can evolve over time. AVID presents a curriculum and recommends that certain elements must be included, but a teacher

is given freedom to choose how the elements are utilized within the classroom. Because AVID is disseminated across the country, its founders recognize that students will need varying types of instruction.

There is no single correct method to implement AVID, as long as the purpose of AVID is maintained: "… to restructure the teaching methods of an entire school and to open access to the curricula that will ensure four-year college eligibility to almost all students" (*Shaping the American Dream*, 2003). Flexibility was evident in all three classrooms because each teacher's pedagogy was different, yet they were all applying basic AVID principles. Each teacher tailored instruction to meet the needs of his or her particular students.

Voluntary Participation

Voluntary participation in AVID is a key component for both teachers and students in the program. Within AVID training, much time is spent on this concept to reinforce the idea that participants must want to be in the program to do well. It is one of the essentials touched upon in the training and is included in the manual as an AVID essential: "AVID program participants, both students and staff, must choose to participate" (*Shaping the American Dream*, 2003). The program is ineffective if participation is not voluntary by both teacher and students. AVID takes time and commitment from parents, teachers, and students and all must be fully dedicated for the program to be effective. AVID research has

shown a high correlation between voluntary participation by both teachers and students and academic growth (Freedman, 2000). For students, this comes in the form of having to sign a contract prior to enrollment. Both the parent and student sign a contract stating that he or she is a willing participant who will take the required courses and work diligently during AVID class to take advantage of the support system available there. Within the contract, the grade requirements are also written and parents must sign off that they are willing to be involved in the education of their children. This involvement can be as simple as providing a place to study at home or volunteering in the classroom. The contract asks for commitment from both the student and his or her family. A student who does not want to be in AVID will likely not do the work required to stay in the program; motivation must be high in order to work toward the high standards required.

Voluntary participation by teachers is vitally important as well. To be an AVID teacher requires extra time and effort. The teacher must spend a week of time in the summer to attend the institute and must commit time during the year to meet with the AVID coordinator. In addition, there is paperwork involved, which adds to the large amount of papers involved in regular teachers' day. Teachers must maintain statistics on each student for every six-week period, keep copies of contracts and student files, and be aware of students' achievement in each of their academic classes. It is a personal time investment in the students and so must be one that a teacher is willing to make. A forced participation in AVID would likely

lead to an ineffective AVID program. Each of the teachers in my study acknowledged the increased workload but expressed the belief that the extra time was worth it to be involved in the academic success of their students.

This dissertation discusses the way in which three teachers bring to life a program designed to increase access to honors courses and colleges for student of color. Though this study focuses on one program, it also reveals the possibility for understanding school success for students who statistically are not performing well in schools. By looking at pedagogy employed in three AVID classrooms, I will try to provide clarity to the role the teacher plays in a program with a specific purpose and flexible design.

WHY AVID MATTERS

AVID is about access to opportunities in education and promises made to students of color with the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. It is the year 2004 and so little has changed in education for students of color. People of color are still overwhelmingly educated in facilities that are in need of repair and by teachers less qualified than those seen in White suburban districts (Kozol, 1991). *Brown v. Board* promised a new beginning, an educational system that leveled the playing field, but the nation has yet to deliver on that promise. Instead, we have stopped integration practices, White people have moved to the suburbs, and we place our least experienced teachers in classrooms where the most experience is needed (Kozol, 1991; Lipman, 1998; Spring, 2001).

Whether directly involved in education or not, all citizens should be concerned with the fact that the majority (ironically, what is referred to as the minority) of our students are being educated in a system that does not prepare them adequately for college or the work force. This should be of concern because

> Students from linguistic and ethnic minority backgrounds are expected to compose an increasing percentage of the U.S. population just when jobs that require higher education are expected to increase in number. Students from linguistic and ethnic minority backgrounds, however, are neither performing in high school well enough nor enrolling in college in sufficient numbers to qualify for the increasing number of jobs that will require baccalaureate degrees. (Mehan et al., 1996, p. 184)

It is our responsibility as educators to prepare all of our students for the future and not leave what is becoming the majority behind in terms of academic success and opportunities.

If mainstream society continues to stand by the mantra that everyone can make it in this country if they just work hard enough, many kids will continue to be left behind. In the current political climate of “no child left behind,” programs and tools must be provided that guarantee academic opportunity and success for every child. Recognition and discussion of the inequities in our K-12 school systems must be discussed and not just in academia. This conversation must enter the hallways of the nation’s schools and the streets of neighborhoods. We cannot

afford as a nation to continue to ignore the fact that Whites and students of color are educated differently and, as a result, perpetuate a system where Whites have access to better schools and thus, better jobs. Scheurich (2002) makes this point with the passion and urgency it deserves:

> Our schools are equally Highly Se-Gre-Gated. Overwhelmingly, children of color attend school with other children of color. However, even if children of color and whites are in the same school, segregation is maintained through academic tracking, special education, and discipline policies, among other means – a kind of RACIAL PROFILING, a kind of APARTHEID. The highest track classes, just like the highest level jobs and the best neighborhoods, are dominated (have dominion, territory controlled by a sovereign) by white children. The lowest track classes, just like the lowest, worst paid jobs and the worst housing stock, are dominated by children of color. All whites know this. This is not hidden from them. We White People choose our housing, our schools, and the classes within our schools on this basis. (p. 4& 5)

I cannot address the issue any more eloquently than this; attention must be paid to the inequities in schools and work done to eliminate them. To do otherwise would be to continue a system of separate and unequal education.

Although AVID cannot cure all that ails us in this area, it is a program worth investigating and replicating because of the opportunities it affords students

of color. As Mehan et al. (1996) conclude in their study on AVID, "… if we are to find ways to defeat reproductive mechanisms, then we must institutionalize practices that increase the possibility of equality" (p. 231). Although my study does not address the political, economic, and social policies that must accompany change for students of color, it effectively points to a means to begin the metamorphosis of pedagogy within individual classrooms. AVID makes explicit the rules of the hidden curriculum and attempts to teach underserved students the rules for academic success. The hidden curriculum refers to the ways of talking, thinking, and acting that are implicit within school structures and are rules that are typically not known by students outside of the dominant culture. (Mehan et. al., 1996) As I highlight the practices of three high-school teachers implementing the AVID program, the importance of a program that attempts to open academic doors to students of color frames my investigation. Focusing on a program like AVID and on the teachers who embrace its principles is a small step toward making educational institutions more accessible and equitable.

STUDY FOCUS

AVID attempts to provide access to the "hidden curriculum" for students of color. Elements of this hidden curriculum include,

> The imperative to transmit a certain body of knowledge from teacher to students, the concern for factually correct information, the use of 'known information questions' in verbal instruction, an insistence on text-based

> knowledge, the high value attached to naming, labeling, and categorizing information, especially out of context, are part and parcel of this culture. (Mehan et. al. 1996)

The program is, in the words of an AVID instructor, "an opportunity to learn how to play the academic game" (H. Miller, personal communication, September 10, 2002). AVID expands ideas about what is appropriate education for students of color and tries to mirror the educational experiences of more affluent, White students. Teachers in an AVID classroom teach not only academics but also how to question inequality, racism, and injustice that exist in society (Gay, 2000).

The program has been shown to increase the academic performance of its students in high school and has demonstrated an increase in college attendance rates for this population (See Freedman, 2000; Mehan, 1996). Several sources, including private, federal, and state agencies, have studied AVID and found that 90% of AVID graduates attend college and 89% are still in college after two years (Guthrie & Guthrie, 2000). Studies also reveal that AVID students attend four-year colleges in greater numbers than non-AVID students with similar profiles. The same study illuminates the fact that 43% of Latinos and 55% of African Americans in the AVID program enroll in college, compared to a national average of 29% of Latinos and 33% of African Americans. A follow-up study showed that AVID students in California

attended four-year universities at a rate of three times the state average (Guthrie & Guthrie, 2000). Over 80% of AVID graduates were enrolled continuously and reported that they were on track to graduate within five years (Guthrie & Guthrie, 2000).

Previous studies on AVID are important and point to the success of the program; however, what is missing are models of how it is implemented in schools. A description of what teachers do on a daily basis in their AVID classrooms is a noticeable gap in the research. The summer institute attempts to teach educators how to implement the program, but real stories about real teachers could enhance this training. I will examine freshmen- and senior-level AVID courses in an attempt to describe how teachers enact the AVID program using their unique pedagogy and responding to the specific needs of their students.

THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF AVID

In order to better understand the way AVID functions in a school, a detailed description of the structure of an AVID class will now be offered. Each AVID class meets once a day for forty-five minutes. The AVID classes at Regis are divided by grade level, there are two freshmen AVID classes, one sophomore class, one junior class and one senior class. At Regis, the goal is for each incoming freshmen class to stay with the same teacher and same group of students through their senior year. A typical week in AVID is as follows: Mondays and Wednesdays are reserved for AVID curriculum, Tuesdays and Thursdays are

tutorial days. Fridays are guest speakers, field trips and/or student discussion opportunities. AVID curriculum includes writing, college and career work, and strategies for academic success. Tutorials are days when the college tutors come into the classroom and lead collaborative study groups, writing groups, and Socratic seminars.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Research documenting the achievement gap between White students and students of color is abundant (Ogbu, 1987; Trueba, 1989; Osborne, 1996; Sleeter, 1996; Lipman 1998). Historically, this gap has been explained by faulting personal characteristics of students of color; however, there is growing movement toward examining academic institutions in search of reasons for the disparity between White students and students of color. Educational researchers must explore the possibility that schools are to blame for the lack of academic success for students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1994). An effective way to improve the school experiences of students of color is to examine programs and teachers that help them achieve academic success.

The following literature review will discuss how schools in America work as sites of oppression and reproduction of the current social order. I will discuss the achievement gap between White students and students of color as well as the lack of success in closing this gap. Multicultural education will be presented as an example of a well-intentioned reform, which has failed in its effort to raise academic achievement for students of color. I will then suggest culturally relevant pedagogy as a possible means by which to lessen the achievement disparity,

focusing on the works of Ladson-Billings (1994), Delpit (1995), Gay (2000), and Sleeter (1996), among others. Finally, I will present the program I studied, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), and describe the contributions it can make to improve the academic lives of students of color.

SCHOOLS AS OPPRESSORS

The dismal state of education for students of color and low-income students has been well researched and documented (hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994;Osborne, 1996; Gay, 2000). Many theorists are overt in their beliefs about schools as places that reinforce the status quo. Trueba points out that the relationship between schools, social structure, and economic mobility seems to go against the belief that schools reward deserving students. Instead, he argues that schools are designed to keep elite people in power (Trueba, 1989). Modern American schools are unable, without major changes being made, to significantly change the social order of society. Many theorists agree that the formulation of our education system was historically steeped in serving the needs of the majority population or, more specifically, White males (Ogbu, 1978; Sleeter, 1996; Spring, 2001). Early denial of equal education for students of color was based on economic exploitation of dominated groups. Segregated schools were established early and designed with several goals in mind: to ensure that dominated groups could not use education as a means for economic advancement, to make students of color feel inferior to European Americans, to

teach skills for menial labor versus true academic content, and to serve as a means for European Americans to believe in their own racial superiority (Spring, 2001).

Unequal educational experiences for students of color were present from the beginning of formal education:

> … schools for rural African-American that were open only a few weeks of the year; schools in poor urban areas that students and teachers described as "like prisons," places actively hostile to learning. (Brinkley, 1984, p. 457-458)

There continues to be a vast difference in the quality of education received by those in the suburbs, typically White students, versus those in the inner city. Typically, "east of anywhere" (Kozol, 1991) describes a part of town that most people avoid at all costs, yet we expect many of our children to be educated in these areas. Schools continue to favor affluent populations in their habit of

> … facilitating entry of certain students into more privileged locations in the labor market; the worst simply lock the doors to those privileged locations for students already disproportionately disadvantaged. In all, the schools constitute a loaded social lottery in which the dice fall in favor of those who already have power and money. (McLaren, 1989, p. 9)

Although educators and educational researchers are aware of this shortcoming, the reforms offered have yet to make a significant impact on leveling the disparity that exists between White students and students of color.

The move to make educational experiences equal for all students is prevalent, but often the reforms embraced fail to yield positive results for the populations they seek to help (King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lipman, 1995). Reforms, both liberal and conservative, have failed to address the problems of race, class, and gender that exist within schools (McLaren, 1989). Lipman comments on this dilemma:

> The overwhelming failure of schools to develop the talents and potential of students of color is a national crisis. The character and depth of this crisis are only dimly depicted by low achievement scores and high rates of school failure and dropping out. More profoundly, these outcomes are indicators of deeply alienating and unjust educational experiences. Those experiences, in turn, point to a wider set of oppressive social and economic conditions, cultural marginality, racism, and disempowerment that is a daily reality for millions of children of color in the United States today. (Lipman, 1998, p. 2)

The focus needs to be on the inclusion of students of color so that methodology and curriculum are not resulting in the isolation of these students. The continued

failure to examine the root of the problem, societal hierarchy, leads to an inability to provide equal educational opportunities for all students.

Delpit (1988) addresses the inherent hierarchy in society in her coining of the term "the culture of power" within schools. This culture of power is manifested in middle-class values and ideals that schools perpetuate, a practice that is effective for students who come to school knowing the rules and procedures of the dominant culture (Delpit, 1988). This term and its analysis recognizes the fact that schools enact societal norms such as language, ways of writing, and ways of interacting that represent the dominant culture, and, as such, serve to reinforce the idea that there is one mode of learning and communicating within schools (Delpit, 1988). This practice necessarily has a detrimental effect on students who do not enter schools knowing the rules for behavior and learning and serves to maintain the present hierarchy in society in which many students of color are at the bottom.

Delpit's work has led others to examine this problem within schools and to begin to discuss the ramifications of such practices. Banks (1993) comments on the institutionalization of the status quo, pointing out,

> School and societal knowledge that presents issues, events, and concepts primarily from the perspectives of dominant groups tends to justify the status quo, rationalize racial and gender inequality, and to make students content with the status quo. An important latent function of such

> knowledge is to convince students that the current social, political, and economic institutions are just and that substantial change within society is neither justified nor required. (p. 128)

If this is true, then schools exist merely to teach students how to act and think in ways that conform to what society has deemed appropriate and serve to continue the oppression of disenfranchised populations.

There is a societal norm presented within schools that marginalizes those who do not conform to majority ways of thinking and knowing (Delpit, 1988; Gay, 2000). For example, there is an insistence that all students be educated in English even when that is not their native language. This has resulted in students of color being educated in ways that do not conform to their unique backgrounds, resulting in their inability to achieve at the same levels as their White peers. This inequality in schooling demands that we take action to better serve our population of students of color. The method by which to do that is a complicated and controversial one, for it demands that we change our Eurocentric (Teel, Parecki, and Covington, 1998) curriculum to one that represents a heterogeneous population. Many are opposed to this idea because it involves a radical reconstruction of education theories and practices. Our system of education is deeply ingrained in our society; we expect schools to remain consistent and change comes slowly.

Ladson-Billings (1994) makes a strong point about what is happening in schools for African American populations:

> The typical experience in the schools is a denigration of African and African-American culture. Indeed, there is a denial of its very existence. The language that students bring with them is seen to be deficient – a corruption of English. The familial organizations are considered pathological. And the historical, cultural, and scientific contributions of African Americans are ignored or rendered trivial. (p. 138)

While this comment focuses on a single ethnicity, it represents a common experience for students of color. Schools in the United States continue to try and "Americanize" students, placing those who do not fit into established norms into tracked classes, including special-education tracks.

This discussion of how schools oppress students of color leads to an examination of the theories present in schools that perpetuate this situation.

DEFICIT THINKING

Deficit thinking is another factor, in addition to the nature of schools as sites of reproduction, that harms children of color and widens the achievement gap between White students and students of color. The following presents an overview of deficit thinking as well as a discussion of its present day ramifications.

The deficit model has persisted for over a century. As early as 1859, with the publication of *The Origin of the Species* by Charles Darwin, deficit thinking has been intact. Leaders of the time took his work and surmised that because Whites have larger brain cases and had been able to establish advanced civilizations, they were superior to all other races (Menchaca, 1997). Put simply, deficit thinking supports the idea " … that the student who fails in school does so because of internal deficiencies. Such deficits manifest, it is alleged, in limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn and immoral behavior" (Valencia, 1997, p. 2). Unfortunately, this idea was adopted by many and additional research was conducted and published to supported these findings.

The work of Herbert Spencer and Sir Francis Galton publicized Darwin's work and perpetuated the view that people of color and poor people were disadvantaged because they were less intelligent than European Americans. These ideas served to justify the need to keep the White race pure and separate from minorities and to support the idea of separate and unequal education (Blum, 1978). The creation of intelligence tests by Binet and Simon served to popularize the belief that intelligence was genetically determined and that European-American students had the benefit of being genetically more intelligent than students of color. Their work provided validity and momentum to research on intelligence tests (Menchaca, 1997).

Audrey Shuey concluded that Whites were intellectually superior to Blacks based on years of collecting intelligence data on both (Shuey, 1966). Arthur Jensen followed with a work concluding that differences in IQ scores between Whites and Blacks were a result of genetics and that Blacks were genetically inferior to and less intelligent than Whites. Jensen reintroduced the ideas of Booker T. Washington and called for industrial-type education for students of color—to prepare them for the jobs that would likely be available to them. He cited the failure of compensatory education programs as a reason for changing the focus of education for students of color (Jensen, 1969). These historical researchers and the wide circulation of their ideas have permeated social thought and strengthened deficit ideas.

As recently as 1994, the idea that intelligence is genetically based resurfaced with the publication of Herrnstein and Murray's *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). This well-circulated book repeated ideas about genetic intelligence based on race and introduced the idea that America was headed toward a welfare state in which the wealthy elite will end up "taking care" of the underprivileged. This body of work has served to reinforce some people's idea that people of color are somehow less intelligent or less deserving than the White population. This brief historical overview has been provided to illustrate the extent to which deficit theory has been disseminated in society and accepted by some parties.

Most reforms prevalent in schools today are steeped in deficit ideas about internal shortcomings of students. “Such deficits manifest, it is alleged, in limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn, and immoral behavior” (Valencia, 1997, p. 2). This practice of labeling and judging students of colors by dominant-culture standards is illustrated in schools where students of color are over-represented in special education and in school suspension programs (Valencia, 1997; Kailin, 1999; Asante, 1991). Deficit thinking has led to stratification within schools and the application of derogatory labels on students such as “culturally deprived” and “at-risk” to describe students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1994). These labels follow individual students throughout their school careers and affect their learning experiences.

The most prominent modern-day application of deficit thinking is the construction of the at-risk child. These children are thought to be “…predisposed to dropping out, for example, overage for grade; failing grades” (Valencia and Solorzano, 1997, p. 195). The term originated as a means to criticize the tendency of schools to place students in jeopardy, not to criticize characteristics of the students (Valencia, 1997). As a result of its metamorphosis in meaning, many of students are labeled “at-risk” and asked to change to fit the system rather than the system attempting to accommodate them. Valencia (1997) discovered over 2,500 articles and papers relating to the at-risk label, demonstrating its widespread acceptance and use in the educational community.

The at-risk label is controversial at best, and damaging at worst because it blames the student's academic problems on characteristics that the child brings to school. It is also alarming that the number of students being labeled at-risk is steadily on the rise (Valencia, 1997). The widespread acceptance of this term and its assumptions leaves out a discussion of flaws within schools and society.

Valencia and Pearl (1997) construct a chilling picture of the future if the current trend toward deficit theory is allowed to grow:

> … if left to go unchallenged, [deficit-theory] will grow in such magnitude in education policy implications that the first decade of the forthcoming twenty-first century will rival the 1960's deficit thinking in social import. Ongoing dissent, deconstruction of deficit notions, alternative and credible interpretations of school failure, and models of democratic, equitable education must continue to be advanced. (p. 251)

The labels of at-risk and/or disadvantaged student repeatedly point out examples of school failure based on the assumption that personal characteristics of the children are the cause of their academic difficulties.

Ladson-Billings' writes that "… the term *at risk* is now used to describe certain students and their families in much the same way that they had been described for almost two hundred years" (1994, p. 9). Schools have persevered in their attempt to explain the achievement gap by placing the responsibility on

inherent characteristics of the children and not on the school's curriculum or teacher pedagogy.

The idea that people of color are less intelligent than Whites is antiquated; yet many Americans still cling to its premise. Scheurich (2002) remarks about the damaging effects of such mindsets:

> The horrendously destructive implication of this is that, because some racial groups and the poor typically do less well in school, these groups have a genetically-based, lower average IQ. (p. 103)

The implications for schools that create curriculum and pedagogy around this idea are perilous and serve to reinforce the deficit models of teaching and learning that have been present since the establishment of public education. A deficit model that has been particularly detrimental to students of color is the practice of tracking within schools.

TRACKING

Tracking, or the assigning of specific students to lower level classes, is an offshoot of deficit thinking and is abundant in schools. Assignments into tracked programs are often driven by perceptions about what certain students are capable of accomplishing (Garcia, 2001). Overwhelmingly, it is students of color who are tracked into classes not deemed "advanced" or even on level, but rather low-level, and it is assumed that these students do not expect to seek postsecondary education (Fine, 1991). Once a student is placed in a remedial

program it is very difficult for him or her to get out. These students are often faced with a watered-down curriculum and teachers who are not trained in language acquisition or cultural sensitivity. What results is a sub par education for these students (Oakes, 1985).

Tracking for students who speak languages other than English is particularly detrimental as it involves separating the students completely from the regular curriculum and fuels a perception that those in English as a Second Language (ESL) are less than capable of success in schools. In addition, there is no option to enroll in advanced ESL courses and students are limited to learning conversational skills versus true academic content (Valenzuela, 1999).

> In Mehan's (1996) study of untracking, he found the following:
>
> The distribution of students to high, middle, and low ability groups or academic and general tracks seems to be related to ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Children from low-income or one parent households, or from families with an unemployed worker, or from linguistic and ethnic minority groups, are more likely to be assigned to low-ability groups or tracks. Furthermore, ethnic and linguistic minority students are consistently underrepresented in programs for the "gifted and talented." (Mehan et al., 1996, p. 5)

Tracking infiltrates all levels of schooling, from ability groups in grammar school to college-prep versus minimal graduation requirements in high school.

Students are predisposed to ideas about what they are capable of achieving early in their academic careers.

The most damaging aspect of tracking is its caste-like character (Mehan et al., 1996). Once students are assigned to a low track, sometimes as early as kindergarten, it is very difficult to move out of this track. Tracking is increasingly based not on ability level but on racial, ethnic, and social class. "[W]hen students are tracked on the basis of class, race, and ethnicity and not on the basis of individual effort and achievement, students in tracked schools are denied equal access to educational and occupational opportunity" (Mehan et al., 1996, p. 8). Tracking maintains an unequal system of education and sustains the achievement gap between White students and students of color.

The history of schools, especially who established them and who was allowed to be educated, led to the unequal system of education that survives today. There is a significant difference in the education students at affluent schools receive versus the education received by students in urban, low-income schools. This is perpetuated by the "culture of power" within schools and the practice that schools have adopted of maintaining the status quo (Delpit, 1988; Sleeter, 1991). Finally, as this practice was recognized, reformers began to try and fix the situation by blaming internal characteristics of the students for school failure instead of academic institutions. Schools have oppressed students of color through segregation practices, unequal financing among schools, and

adoption of deficit models of instruction. The achievement gap between White students and students of color continues to widen in part, because of these practices.

THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP: ITS EXISTENCE AND PERSISTENCE

Inequality in education is not a new issue, yet the gap continues to widen between White students and students of color. Osborne notes, "statistics clearly indicate that the vast majority of students from non-Anglo cultural/social groups in Western nations are not receiving quality education and that inequality continues to expand rather than contract" (1996, p. 286).

Our nation's segregated schools maintain an achievement gap between White students and students of color that continues to widen despite supposed attempts to improve the education of students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lipman, 1998). Evidence of vast inequities between the races in terms of schools is available in Jonathon Kozol's renowned work *Savage Inequalities*, in which he describes the horrific circumstances under which some children of color are expected to learn. Many American citizens mistakenly feel that segregation is a past injustice that no longer needs to be discussed (Kozol, 1991). Americans seem to have embraced "separate but equal" again, but this time without question or concern.

Ladson-Billings discusses the educational climate in her book *The Dreamkeepers* (1994):

> African-American students continue to lag behind their white counterparts on all standard measures of achievement. African-American children are three times as likely to drop out of school as white children are and twice as likely to be suspended from school. … African-American students make up only about 17 percent of the public school population but 41 percent of the special education population. (p. 2)

This practice of tracking students of color into special education is prevalent and removes the need for teachers to change their teaching style (Lipman, 1998). Instead, they dismiss those they cannot teach to remedial or special education classes. Students of color are placed in unchallenging classes and tracked into vocational classes at higher levels than White students, neither of which prepares them for the possibility of college (Oakes, 1985).

The research points to the need to recognize that the gap between White students and students of color still exists, despite a wave of reforms that has attempted to lessen it. The failure of reform programs is often

> …used by the dominant culture as evidence to support the myth-based definitions of academic failure: that failure lies in the genes, character traits, or home lives of the students themselves. Even good programs can fail because the clientele is unreachable, hence unteachable. Failure, therefore, simply proves the assumptions on which the policy was based. (McLaren, 1989, p. 225)

This is an easy habit to adopt, for it is easier to blame personal characteristics of students than to critique and examine the institutions of which we are all a part.

Another method that ensures inequality in education is the creation of schools within the same district that are unequal in their opportunities for students. The disproportion is perpetuated through inequities in school finance, segregation, and the underserving of students who do not speak English (Valenzuela, 1999). School finance, in particular, is linked to unequal schools as monies spent per student differ among wealthy and poor schools, with wealthier schools coming out on top. Thus far, attempts at reform have failed to equalize this situation (McLaren, 1989). In Lakewood, where I conducted my study, there exists a plan to distribute funds equally that is under constant attack by the wealthy elite who want to see their tax money stay with their schools.

Lipman (1995) addresses the achievement gap that continues to exist between White students and students of color despite numerous attempts at reform:

> Over the last ten years, countless local and national projects have been launched to reshape curriculum instruction, assessment, school organization, and governance and the professional roles of educators. The real test of these educational reforms will be: Do they improve the academic performance and educational experience of all students, especially those whom our schools are failing most? (p. 202)

This quote points to the fact that educational change is ongoing, but often reformers fail to examine the effect of their actions on students of color who are in the most need of effective educational modifications (Ladson-Billings, 1995; King, 1991). This failure is significant because the number of students of color is increasing, yet current curriculum and pedagogy continue to be designed for a White, middle class audience (Zeichner, 1993). Most current reforms are not working and students of color continue to suffer while reformers repeatedly adopt and dismiss programs in an attempt to fix the growing problem.

Research has shown that students of color are affected by racism and that they experience

> (1) culturally biased curriculum and instruction, testing and tracking; (2) high suspension and detention penalties; (3) racial epithets, physical attacks, and stereotyping; (4) lowered teacher expectations; (5) lack of antiracist policies; (6) the effects of biased teacher hiring practices and; (7) lack of equal access and financing for education. (Donaldson, 1997, p. 31)

Unfortunately, the above problems have not been adequately addressed in schools and the fact is that this prejudicial treatment follows people of color out of the classroom and into society.

Numerous reform movements have developed over the years in an attempt to decrease the achievement gap between students of color and White

students. A complete discussion of all of them is beyond the scope of this study. I will briefly discuss multicultural education and culturally relevant teaching as well-meaning reforms that attempt to bridge the gap between White students and students of color.

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Multicultural education is a reform that has attempted to close the achievement gap between White students and students of color. Its basic premise and forms will be discussed in the following section, noting that multicultural education has the potential to make significant changes; however, the way it has been enacted has prevented it from making a significant impact on the achievement gap.

Multicultural education has multifaceted definitions and implementation strategies. It is defined by Banks (1993) as "… an idea, an educational reform movement, and a process whose major goal is to change the structure of educational institutions" (p. 7). Multicultural education seeks to allow other voices to be heard within the canon and is based on the "… belief that schools in a democracy can and should prepare future citizens to work actively and collectively on problems facing society" (Grant & Sleeter, 1989, p. 211). Multicultural education is meant to be transformative, to recognize racism and injustice, and to offer ways to combat past behavior (Bennett, 1990). These

definitions taken together provide a picture of what multicultural education is capable of in its ideal form.

Multiculturalism seeks to present the history of people from all backgrounds and how people of all cultures contributed to the making of our nation. Multiculturalism has been accepted and adopted as evidenced by the growing number of scholars who commit their time to the issue such as Banks (1993), Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995, 2001), Garcia (2001) and Nieto (2002), among others. In addition, the emergence of multicultural journals and multicultural courses required by colleges of education shows the commitment of researchers and educators to make this a salient issue and one that serves to better the educational experiences of students of color (Gay, 2000).

Multicultural education strives to give typically silenced voices an arena in which to be heard. Multiculturalism provides a way to represent many cultures within a curriculum, and helps students express ideas and direct lives toward fulfilling personal and societal needs (Gay, 2000). Multicultural education attempts to represent familiar people and ideas to students of color so that they will become more engaged in school and strive to enter society confident in their culture and in their abilities. Further, multicultural education hopes to enhance the education of all students and bring society closer to achieving true democracy (Mitchell-Powell, 1992). A first step toward a multicultural classroom is to empower teachers with knowledge about how to

have a more inclusive curriculum. Unfortunately, most multicultural education efforts have become somewhat shallow; teachers are including other cultures in their curriculum, but not acknowledging the issues of power and privilege that Banks's definition of multicultural education proposed to address.

Multicultural education, in its ideal form,

> … forges a coalition among various oppressed groups as well as members of dominant groups, teaching directly about political and economic oppression and discrimination, and preparing young people directly in social action skills. (Sleeter, 1991, p. 12)

The key component here is the discussion of oppression and discrimination of students of color that this knowledge has the potential to change.

Teaching in a multicultural manner involves more than disseminating facts about various cultures. It requires an examination of cultures and differences in cultures as subjects of study. Currently, this is not what some educators who practice multicultural education accomplish.

The move to include all cultures within the curriculum is a positive one, but fails to recognize the oppression, both past and present, and the previously discussed "culture of power" under which students of color live (Delpit, 1988). Multicultural education was designed to transform the ways in which students and teachers view the world. The result of failing to examine social hierarchy within schools is highly detrimental as, "… using either additive or an infusion

approach, the basic assumptions, perspectives, paradigms, and values of the dominant culture remain unchallenged and substantially unchanged…" (Banks, 1991, p. 130). It has been more comfortable for educators to simply add material about different ethnic groups than to examine society and critique it.

Multicultural education, in its present form, has many supporters; most do not object to expanding the curriculum materials to include other voices. However, more academics are beginning to realize its deficiencies and speak to the fact that it fails to examine the inherent racism and social hierarchy present in our world. Current multicultural curriculums neglects to address the relationship between the cultures of students of color and the dominant, White culture (Ogbu, 1992). A discussion of racism is left out of the curriculum and serves to reinforce dominant group norms.

> It is precisely this dilemma, whereupon racist practices in the society devalue minority groups' cultural reference points, that faces minority students and that multicultural education has not addressed, let alone provided strategies for empowering such students to counteract effectively." (Mattai, 1992, p. 70)

Students of color need models of people like themselves in the curriculum as well as a way of examining and discussing issues of power and privilege in society.

Multiculturalism began as a movement to confront issues of race and racism in society, but has evolved into an examination of diversity. This degeneration of the original focus means that multiculturalism has moved from an examination of race and race relations to a mere inclusion of all cultures in the curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The multicultural agenda has been watered down to pacify those who do not want to examine such issues. Many teachers who use a multicultural approach do it "… without thinking about social inequality or empowerment at all" (Sleeter, 1991, p. 2).The crux of the subject, examining racism, has been ignored or minimized by public institutions (Sleeter, 1996).

Multicultural education has, at best, succeeded in allowing the contributions of ethnic minorities to be recognized in schools. It has, however, failed in its original purpose to examine racism in the present culture and work to eradicate it within the schools. Banks (1990) points out that the information taught in schools is a form of cultural capital that represents the dominant or White culture and diminishes contributions of other ethnicities. Multicultural education seeks to provide a voice for others and to help students to recognize the significance of all people in the forming of our nation. Arthur Pearl (1997) in envisioning a democratic education writes,

> A democratic multicultural education starts with a shared common understanding from which different cultures emerge as spokes. The

> democratic multicultural curriculum equips all students with the capacity to be informed, competent citizens in a society with diverse populations and diverse interests. (p. 221)

This vision has yet to be achieved through multicultural education as it currently does little more than celebrate cultures on specific months and add information about various cultures, rather than attempt to improve conditions for those at the bottom or help to increase understanding of self and other in the dominant culture (Pearl, 1997).

The introduction of culturally relevant pedagogy, which works to have teachers in the classroom with "…cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness…" (Ladson-Billings, 2001, p. 31) transcends the current climate in schools and looks more promising in improving education for students of color. This optimistic summary should not be interpreted as the answer to inequity in education. I merely believe that culturally relevant teaching has maintained its focus on examining societal hierarchies, not that it can cure all the problems that exist for students of color.

CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEACHING

Culturally relevant pedagogy builds upon the original goal of multicultural education and seeks to get people of all races to recognize and understand society's racial hierarchy (Ladson-Billlings, 1994; Gay, 2000). It focuses on the original goal of multicultural education: to examine issues of

power and privilege in society. Ladson-Billings has identified three aspects that must be present for culturally relevant teaching (CRT) to occur:

> (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; (c) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. (1995, p. 160)

In her work, Ladson-Billings (1994) provides examples of teachers who, through pedagogical practices and inherent beliefs about students, raise achievement levels for students of color. Ladson-Billings reveals that each of the eight teachers in her study had very different teaching styles, but all were similar in their self-perceptions and perceptions of their students.

Specifically, the teachers in a study she conducted had the following things in common which identified their teaching practices as culturally relevant: Each identifies strongly with teaching and has chosen to work with low-income African American students. The teachers she studied also believe that teaching is an art versus a technical skill. In other words, it cannot necessarily be taught, but is an interpersonal skill an individual possesses. Teachers who practice culturally relevant pedagogy believe, without exception, that all of their students will succeed. These teachers are able to keep relations between themselves and students fluid—teachers were sometimes learners and learners were sometimes teachers.

Each of the teachers in her study are actively involved in the local community; students see and interact with their teachers outside of the classroom. These teachers believe knowledge is continuously created, and they exhibit a passion for their subject matter. (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Culturally relevant teachers also recognizes and respect all students in the classroom, not just those that represent dominant ways of knowing and thinking.

Culturally relevant teaching examines the culture of power as described by Delpit: “There are codes or rules for participating in power; that is, there is a ‘culture of power.’ Issues of power are enacted in classrooms” (Delpit, 1988, p. 26). These premises about the culture of power reveal that students must acquire the rules of those in power in order to be successful in schools. White people have established rules, codes of conduct, language, and behaviors that are acceptable in society and in schools. People of color are evaluated in terms of these societal rules. This implies that success in social institutions, including schools, forces students to adopt the culture of those who are in power (Delpit, 1988). Delpit suggests that students who are not members of the culture of power be told explicitly what the rules and expectationsare, thereby facilitating the learning process. Culturally relevant teaching addresses this issue by talking to students about the existence of the culture of power and how to function within it while still maintaining their cultural identities.

The practice of culturally relevant teaching attempts to provide students with

> A pedagogy that empowers intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These cultural referents are not merely vehicles for bridging or explaining the dominant culture; they are aspects of the curriculum in their own right. (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 18)

Culturally relevant teaching is an attempt to validate student culture and express its importance in society, both past and present. In addition, culturally relevant pedagogy encourages teachers to openly discuss issues of power in modern-day society (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2000). This method of instruction does not pretend that society is an equal and fair place to be; it openly denounces the structure of society and entertains dialogue about what can be done to create a more level playing field between the races.

The notion of culturally relevant pedagogy is important because as Scheurich (2002) notes, " There is a hierarchy of positions, with upper-class, White males at the top and lower-class males and females of color at the bottom" (p. 29). The sooner we recognize this fact and begin to talk about it, the sooner we can alleviate it. If all races understand and try to change the current system, we will all benefit. Osborne (1996) uses the term "marginalized groups" to refer to students that we have alienated from our curriculum and instruction.

This alienation occurs because the current curriculum has its roots in "… a narrow set of white, Anglo-Saxon, male capitalists and professionals" (Connel, 1989, p. 125). Teachers who practice culturally relevant teaching are aware of this power structure and can use their knowledge to examine both their roles and their students' roles in schools and in society.

Culturally relevant teaching invites students to critically embrace the world around them (McLaren, 1989). For example, to discuss the historical roles of people of color and how these roles have shifted over time. It encourages students to think critically about their world and their place in it versus celebrating specific ethnicities during designated months of the school year. Culturally relevant teachers are also characterized by their ability to examine their own biases and how these affect their teaching practices. Culturally relevant teaching requires that a teacher instruct students to question the status quo and their place in society's hierarchy (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2000). Culturally relevant teachers also celebrate the richness in other cultures within a Eurocentric curriculum and teach students about the culture of power to which they have been denied access (Delpit, 1992).

A culturally relevant teacher is one who is cognizant of his or her own culture and the culture of students in the classroom. Within the framework of CRT, teachers "… stopped blaming and trying to 'fix' the students, validated the worth of students' cultural heritages, accepted the inevitability of cultural

influences on their own beliefs and behaviors, disavowed the sanctity of educational conventions, and placed the burden of change upon themselves" (Gay, 2000, p. 211). Teachers who practice culturally relevant teaching work against the prevailing deficit models present in many schools.

Culturally relevant teaching reinforces the idea that a teacher of students of color will be more effective if he or she has taken the time to understand his or her own culture and the cultures of others. An understanding of the way these cultures function within the educational system is paramount to effective teaching for students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1995). These teachers "… scaffold instruction and build bridges between the cultural experiences of ethnically diverse students and the curriculum content of academic subjects to facilitate higher levels of learning (Gay, 2000, p. 44). Gay hits a key point: Teachers must use the prior knowledge of their students to make connections to learning. Part of this is being familiar with the culture of one's students so the right connections will be made. Culturally responsive pedagogy raises the confidence of students of color by honoring their cultural integrity and connecting it to academic success (Gay, 2000). Student culture is seen as a strength and not a weakness.

Embedded in the theory of culturally relevant teaching is the idea that culture is directly related to the learning process. Educators need to recognize that students of color are often experiencing a culture change in addition to all of

the academic concepts they are being asked to learn. Cultures need more than recognition; they also need validation in the form of being used in the learning process (Trueba, 1988). The research points to many of the same conclusions: Culture should not be a detriment to school success, but a strength. Inclusion of all cultures is as important as teaching in a manner that connects culture and academic success.

The current work toward implementation of CRT is to improve the system that is in place, meaning to empower students through instruction versus moving them to a supposed "better" school. Ladson-Billings' (1994) notion of "taking control of the schools" refers to the need to discover an effective way to teach students of color so that they succeed in the segregated school system that is now in place. This idea refers back to Delpit's admission that the reality of school structure is unfortunate, but one that we must teach our students how to function in effectively until significant changes occur (Delpit, 1988). Until then, culturally relevant pedagogy offers one way that students can learn and discuss the culture of power as well as learn to appreciate and value their own cultures.

Ladson-Billings (1995) writes that culturally relevant teachers "… practice a subversive pedagogy" (p. 128). This term implies that they question administrative practices, curriculum, and school policies for the benefit of the population they teach. They are always thinking in terms of whether their practices will fight against the institutional racism within schools. These teachers

have a specific mission to change current mindsets about the academic ability of students of color.

Culturally relevant teaching, though grounded in extensive research, cannot solve all of the problems in education; no reform proposes to accomplish that goal on its own. What it can do is change attitudes and teaching practices aimed at students of color. It may also lead to the creation of theories and programs that improve education for students of color.

The fact that educators and researchers are presently talking about issues of inequality in education opens the doors to ideas for improvement. One program that has evolved as a result of this discussion is Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). AVID provides a replacement for deficit models, instead focusing on stories of success about students of color in schools. The AVID program is the sole focus of my dissertation endeavor and one that will now be discussed in terms of its contributions to improving the climate in education for students of color.

ADVANCEMENT VIA INDIVIDUAL DETERMINATION (AVID)

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) is a program designed to increase academic access and college attendance rates for students of color. It was developed by a high-school English teacher and demonstrated such

academic success for students of color that the district disseminated the program across the school district. Today, AVID exists in 24 states and 16 countries (*Tools for Schools*, 1998). Each class of AVID functions independently, but all focus on supporting students for an academically vigorous curriculum and helping them apply and be accepted to college. The specific ways in which this comes about will be explored in detail within Chapter Four of this document. For purposes of the literature review, I will discuss AVID in terms of how it works to close the achievement gap between White students and students of color.

Within the literature on the achievement gap between White students and students of color, AVID classrooms have a positive contribution to make. Specifically, there are many quantitative studies that point to the fact that the program is working (see Mehan et al., 1996; Guthrie & Guthrie, 2002). The majority of these studies show statistics that reveal students in AVID are performing well in honors and AP classes and that they also attend college in larger numbers than before AVID was instituted in their school (Mehan et al., 1996).

AVID counteracts the deficit model of tracking students and is considered by at least one team of researchers to be a method of "untracking" (Mehan et al., 1996). AVID's efforts work against the trend to place students of color in remedial classes; it instead raises the bar and places these students in demanding classes while offering academic support. However, AVID is still tracking, albeit

in a different form. The program increases access for students of color, but still practices tracking by letting some students in while keeping others out. Despite this shortcoming, AVID attempts:

> To motivate and prepare underachieving students from underrepresented linguistic and ethnic minority groups or low-income students of any ethnicity to perform well in high school and to seek a college education. (Mehan et al., 1996, p. 14)

In other words, it gives those whom our system has historically underserved a chance to succeed in the academic arena.

A factor that has been shown to improve the academic performance of students is support, both from the teachers and other classmates (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995; Mehan et al., 1996). Geneva Gay (2000) reports that students in Ladson-Billings's study,

> Functioned like members of an extended family, assisting, supporting, and encouraging each other….Educational excellence included academic success as well as cultural competence, critical social consciousness, political activism, and responsible community membership. (p. 31)

AVID operates in this same manner. Students are placed in a cohort for four years whereby they become very close and work together to achieve academic goals. AVID does more that just raise the academic bar for students; it creates an atmosphere of support and caring that results in academic success.

There is no prescribed method by which to guarantee success for students of color, but some things have been shown to make a difference. These include a high level of involvement in school and community, a present connection between school subjects and students' lives, and experiencing success in school (Williams, 1987). Each of these elements is present in the AVID program and is effective due to the hard work and dedication of trained AVID teachers.

AVID is a program, but more importantly, it is a place where teachers play a crucial role in the academic development of their students. Certain elements must be present to create an atmosphere conducive to building community and supporting academic endeavors:

> The directors and teachers of AVID found that achievement was much higher when academic interventions are reinforced by an infrastructure of social supports. These included personal caring, mutual aid and assistance, use of cultural anchors and mediators in instruction, and creating a sense of community among students and teachers. (Gay, 2000, p. 13)

This is not to say that teachers in AVID adopt identical pedagogies; however, in my experience they do create communities of learners who believe they can break through the glass ceiling of academic success.

AVID also recognizes Delpit's culture of power, teaching students how to how to play the game of school and providing access to this culture of power. Providing access to this culture of power is accomplished in multiple ways. One

example is teaching students how to approach their teachers, what language and tone are appropriate. Another example is providing clear instructions on how to apply to college, information that students whose parents did not attend college may not have. AVID teachers train students to think critically about learning, to develop a sense of community within the AVID classroom, and how to acquire the needed social knowledge and skills to function within the school. Teachers also encourage AVID students to identify themselves as members of the program, through special notebooks, logos, and time spent in a designated AVID classroom each day (Mehan et al., 1996; Gay, 2000). AVID does not attempt to hide the fact that success in school requires a particular kind of knowledge; the program is set up to teach that knowledge to whom it has previously been denied. What makes AVID stand out is that it accomplishes this goal for its students

> …without sacrificing their culture and ethnic identities. They become effective "cultural border crossers" by engaging in academic pursuits with their AVID peers at school and recreational and social activities with their neighborhood friends after school. Because AVID uses students' own cultures and experiences as instructional resources…. (Gay, 2000, p. 166)

This is an important consideration given the fact that much attention has been paid to the fact that many students of color choose academic failure in order to avoid "acting White" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ladson-Billings, 1994). AVID is cognizant of this phenomenon and does not ask its students to deny or downplay

their ethnic identity in any way, but instead uses this fact to strengthen curriculum and pedagogical choices.

Part of the way in which this is done is through "social scaffolding" (Mehan et al., 1996) during the learning process. AVID students are not placed in honors courses and then left on their own to survive. Instead, they have support within the AVID classroom from the AVID teacher, their classmates, and college tutors who come in twice a week for tutorial sessions. This is necessary, particularly during the freshmen year, when students are being placed in advanced classes, perhaps for the first time. Teachers and tutors take the time to teach AVID students about the honors course structure and curriculum with the idea of lessening that support as time goes on. The idea is to "… provide supports to students at the beginning of their high school experience, and then remove the supports slowly as students internalize the help their guides provided them so they can finally act on their own" (Mehan et al., 1996, p. 79). By the time students reach their senior year, they succeed in classes largely on their own and are well prepared for the independent learning that will occur in college.

Finally, AVID emphasizes the culturally relevant construct of belief in the academic ability of all students. Research reveals that without this inherent belief, a teacher will be unsuccessful in endeavors to improve the academic experiences of students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Mehan et al., 1996; Gay, 2000). In a study of culturally relevant teaching, a researcher observed an AVID teacher and

concluded that the teacher "looked to improve instruction so that it would provide students with more opportunities to connect with the content she was teaching" (Powell, 1997, p. 479). In other words, this study illustrates at least two AVID teachers who do not blame internal characteristics of students when failure occurs, but instead examine their own practice to ascertain what went wrong.

The belief that all students are capable of academic success is evident within AVID's adoption of high expectations for each student. This aspect of AVID and the fact that it was present in all three classrooms where I observed will be explored in depth within the data chapters of this document, but is mentioned here briefly as an example of the power of high expectations for students by teachers. AVID has been found to change school cultures to the extent that even skeptics have come to believe in the academic capability of students of color in the program (Freedman, 2000; *Shaping the American Dream*, 2003). In high schools where AVID is in place, studies have shown evidence that the success rate of AVID students have influenced learning environments in a positive manner (Mehan et al., 1996).

In conclusion, I would like to review the key ideas presented within this review of the literature. First, I examined the fact that schools were historically framed around the interests of the dominant culture and that we continue to frame programs and pedagogy around the needs and goals of the status quo. I then showed evidence of the expanding achievement gap between White students and

students of color and I discussed why this gap still persists. I introduced multicultural education as a well-intentioned reform that has failed to close the achievement gap because of the way that practitioners are able to enact it. I discussed culturally relevant teaching as a construct that provides hope for changing current paradigms because of its focus on examining social hierarchy and positions of power. Finally, I briefly introduced AVID, a program I believe builds on the key components of Delpit's ideas and has shown success in its ability to teach students of color how to succeed in academic institutions.

My purpose in this chapter was to discuss the literature relevant to the creation of AVID. Multicultural education and culturally relevant teaching are starting points for understanding reforms that are currently in practice and as ideas that have given life to programs like AVID. I also showed that AVID, while well researched in the quantitative mode, has only a few qualitative pieces to its credit. My dissertation is a first look into AVID classrooms and how teachers enact the principles of the program and bring their own ideas and practices to the teaching-learning encounter.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The intent of this study was to document the pedagogical choices of three high-school teachers working in a program designed to provide access to honors courses and increase college attendance for students of color. The study is ethnographic in nature and paints a portrait of three AVID classrooms, the teachers, the students, and the interaction that takes place between them in those instructional settings. By drawing on classroom observations and interviews, I attempt to portray how three different teachers put a large-scale program with clearly focused goals into practice. My research question is this: In what ways do teachers enact pedagogy within AVID, a program designed to increase access to honors/advanced placement courses and increase college attendance rates for students of color?

This study was a qualitative, five-month examination of three teachers with varying levels of experience. Each of the teachers is voluntarily teaching in the AVID program and has from one to three years of experience in the program. I observed two of the teachers three times a week and one teacher once a week. Two of the teachers had overlapping classes so I had to make a choice about whom to observe more often. I chose to observe the 12th-grade teacher more

often because I was already observing two 9th-grade classes and felt that I could benefit most from observing different grade levels of AVID classrooms.

RATIONALE FOR A QUALITATIVE DESIGN

My choice to use qualitative inquiry was influenced by readings in my qualitative methods course and my reading of the works of Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot (1983), Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 2001), Michelle Fine (1991), and Sara and Pauline Lipman (1998). These researchers present their work in the form of qualitative study and write engaging, detailed ethnographies depicting their subjects. I knew that my desire to portray specific teacher pedagogy would lend itself better to a qualitative study versus a quantitative one. In using qualitative inquiry, I come closer to my goal of allowing the reader to observe the environment and meet each individual character (Eisner, 1991). In addition, I do not plan to generalize my findings to all classrooms and engage in a "one size fits all" mode of representation (Erickson, 1986). Instead, I will discuss three teachers' pedagogical choices in implementing the AVID program. In using qualitative research methods, I will paint a picture of what AVID looks like in three separate classrooms.

The specific data sources I chose, teacher observation, fieldnotes, and teacher interviews, are common methods used within qualitative research (Glesne, 1999). In addition, I collected data by attending AVID teacher training in an effort

to better understand the principles and theories behind the program. These sources of data lend themselves to the production of rich text in which I can bring the subjects to life through participants' own words and by describing their actions.

RESEARCHER LENS

A researcher, consciously or not, enters into research with certain biases and lenses through which information is filtered and must reveal these within the research findings (Glesne, 1999). I am no exception to this generality and will, in this section, attempt to provide information about the lens through which I observed teacher pedagogy and interpreted data. I will conclude with a discussion of the ways in which I attempted to address these biases in my work.

My Background

In my proposal meeting with my dissertation committee, the obvious question was asked, "Why do you care about issues of teaching minority students?" According to this professor, it is important for my reader to understand my vantage point, my background, and where my interest stems from; in other words, to put more of myself into the piece. The following is a discussion of why the issue of educating minorities well is so vitally important to me that I have chosen to spend two years of my life studying and writing about this topic.

I attended elementary school in Lakewood, Texas, the same city in which this study takes place. In 1979, a new idea was being implemented in

our district. The idea was called “busing” and students from the east side of town were being bused to the north side in order to integrate the city’s schools. Of course, as a 12-year-old I knew none of this, but was acutely aware of the tensions the action had caused. I have vivid memories of upset parents pulling their children out of the school specifically because of busing. Many of my friends moved to the suburbs of the city and many parents I knew talked openly about their disdain of busing “those” kids to “our” school. In my own home, it was a non-issue—my mom was not one to get overly involved in school issues and the change did not seem to matter to her. Looking back, I realize she raised me in an integrated environment from preschool on. I attended a preschool in Cleveland, Ohio, that was predominately filled with African -American children. In Texas, I participated in activities with African Americans at the local recreation center. Still, this was the first time in my life I had been cognizant of hatred of another group of people and I met the first day of school with trepidation.

As a member of the safety patrol, I was on duty at the bus stops in front of the school when the new students arrived. I remember lots of buses full of brown and Black people stopping and letting the students out. The kids looked a bit bewildered and frightened but disembarked from the bus and went into the school. There were no confrontations or parents picketing as one would see immediately after the *Brown v. Board* decision, but there was definitely

tension present, caused, I now believe, by parents discussing the issue in a negative light in front of their children. The new students fit in well and soon the year was like any other except that on the playground there were students of different races playing together instead of all White children. I feel that it was the students who adapted most quickly—we did not seem to care about the color of our friends' skin, but more about who would be chosen for kickball and when we would have lunch. Of course, I am speaking from the viewpoint of one who was still able to attend my neighborhood school. A different story would come from a student who was bused for more than an hour to attend a supposedly "better" school. Still, my point is that busing had little to no effect on me. I, like many children, adapted to my new classmates quickly.

Kids from this same area of town were bused to north-side school until I finished high school. We grew to be friends through our association in class and on extracurricular teams. During my senior year of high school one of my very best friends was an African American who lived on the east side of town. However, this is also when I began to notice a subtle difference in my friendships with minorities versus Whites. Louise, the aforementioned friend, and I were very close at school—we even chose to be co-captains on a cheerleading squad rather than do the job alone. We were both on the track team and ran on the same relay team. We had the same sense of humor and gave each other advice on relationships. Yet,we did not visit each other's

homes or know one another's family. We had a close relationship at school, but a limited one after school hours. In contrast, I knew all of my White friends' parents and frequented their houses. The answer could lie in simple logistics, but it got me thinking.

The issue surfaced again when, after high school, Louise and I completely lost touch while I was able to keep up with many of my White friends. In fact, at my high school reunion we spent a lot of time asking "where is so and so?" The person being asked about was typically a minority student who had been bused to the north side school. I wonder if my seemingly great experience with busing had the opposite effect on my east-side friends, and perhaps they left high school feeling little connection to the people and places associated with the north side of town. I will never know, but it set the stage for what I experienced in college.

I originally attended Texas A&M University in College Station. I chose this school because I was offered a track scholarship and an opportunity to compete in what was then the Southwest Conference. Within the confines of the team, I was very comfortable and accustomed to the multicultural environment. The discomfort came when I was in class or on campus because I noticed a disturbing trend. Everywhere I saw minorities (and they were few and far between), they were within a group of people like themselves, as were the White people. There was little to no integration on campus. The separation

was noticeable to me because at my high school we did not splinter into groups as I was seeing here. Apart from my track team, I never saw two races hanging out together at A&M. I never saw my teammates out on the town or at parties and when I inquired of a teammate about this she responded, “You have your places and we have ours.” I was dumbstruck and did not utter that question again. Because I was on a relay team composed of all African Americans except myself, I was slowly accepted into the group on a limited basis. I was not invited to social gatherings, but I often roomed with a Black teammate and hung out with the group during meet weekends. They jokingly referred to me as “White girl,” a nickname I had been given in high school as well because I was often the only White person running the sprint races. Two years later I transferred to University of Texas and noticed the same trend in race relations.

At the University of Texas I was no longer a track-team member, but I recall seeing the separation of the races as clearly as I had seen it at Texas A&M. People of different races congregated with their own kind. There were many more races represented at UT than at A&M, but the trend to group together remained. I believed this separation had always existed, but I was just now beginning to notice it. The picture disturbed me, yet my slow infiltration into the White-only world was beginning. As I became more concerned about academics and getting a job, the social issue of integration left my mind and I concerned myself with taking care of my future. Before I knew it, I was

married to a White man, lived in a White area of town, and worked in a corporation where few minorities were employed. Interestingly, I became good friends with the two African American people at my job and we often discussed issues of race within society. The discussions were enlightening, but did nothing to stir me to action.

I probably avoided the issue of race altogether until I became a teacher. During my training, I realized for the first time that schools were unequal institutions that were set up to benefit White, middle-class students. I began to care deeply about these issues; I felt (and still do) that education should be the great equalizer. No one should receive a better education than another because of the color of his or her skin, yet that is what was happening all over the country. Although alarmed and outraged by this realization, I still took the teaching job offered to me in a White suburb. I had some negative feelings about this, that I was "copping out" and being hypocritical, but I wanted to start my career and then move to an inner-city environment, or so I told myself. Due to life circumstances, I never took that step, but instead decided to attend graduate school upon moving to Lakewood. It was within the realm of this graduate program that I became fully committed to equality in education.

The professors in my graduate program introduced me to writers who explored issues of White versus Black and openly criticized the school system for its hegemonic curriculum. Before this, I had never considered that what we

teach is steeped in traditional male, Eurocentric thought (Teel et al., 1998). I had never considered that people of color may have different learning styles and have difficulty succeeding in schools using current modes of instruction and materials. I read and discussed the work of researchers in this area including Ladson-Billings (1995), Delpit (1998), Scheurich (2002), and Spring (2001), among others. This journey instilled within me a desire to focus my dissertation efforts toward examining schools and their inherent inequality. It took time, but I finally decided to concentrate on a program that has proven success for students of color in academic settings.

Prior Experience

My researcher lens was also clouded by my previous experience at this school and with this program. I had conducted a semester-long, in-depth study of the AVID coordinator, Sara Turner, looking at her teaching practices in both her English and AVID classes. My previous work here negatively influenced my ability to be totally objective in the sense that I saw no flaws in Sara and admired her as a teacher and a professional. I found her to be an extraordinary teacher and knew I must be careful not to merely compose a victory narrative. My impressions of Sara influenced my ideas about Regis and about AVID, and would affect my observation and interpretation at some level.

Secondly, my background as a middle- and high-school English teacher undoubtedly influenced my observations. It was difficult to not think about what I

would do in the same situation or to judge the teachers' choices. I have also served as a supervisor of student observers, a role that required me to evaluate teachers. I had to be careful not to evaluate when observing my teachers and stay focused on my role and my purpose, and I had to remind myself that my purpose was to describe the pedagogy observed. My objective to discover and portray the teaching/learning relationship between teacher and student had to be kept in mind at all times.

COMPENSATING FOR BIAS

Although a researcher cannot escape bias, recognizing it and thinking of ways to respond to it are methods of minimizing its effects. I know that my prior research at this school gave me a preconceived idea about many things, including the fact that AVID was generally highly regarded as a program that was effective and produced positive results for students of color. I knew that I would need to be careful to examine thoroughly the nature of the teaching/learning relationship within the program rather than write a glowing review of the program and its teachers. I knew this would be difficult because in my previous work at Regis I had been impressed with the student's work and focus on academics. I had to stay focused on my question and be able to critique as well as praise what I observed. In looking back at my research, I think I observed teaching/learning relationships as objectively as I could; however, I still came away with a very positive view of AVID, its teachers, and its students.

In responding to my previous teaching and supervising experience, I was able to record my evaluative comments within my daily jottings and transcriptions. I knew I would need to vent personal comments and felt these were appropriate venues, as I was the only one who would see them. I was careful not to include such comments within my finished writing. I realize this practice did not completely take evaluation out of my work, but I separated those comments in a different section within my notebook and was then able to exclude them from my final writing.

MEASURES OF TRUST AND CREDIBILITY

All researchers must engage in measures to enhance the believability of their accounts. In my work I established trustworthiness in several ways. Primarily, I used triangulation of my data as a means to contribute to the trustworthiness of the data. My data collection included observation notes, interviews, and attendance at AVID training. These three sources of data allowed for a rich interpretation of findings and lent credibility to my conclusions (Glesne, 1999). I also used the trustworthiness measure of member checking. I offered the opportunity for my participants to review interview transcripts; however, only two chose to engage in this process. Still, their responses provided verification that I was representing them in an accurate manner. My three methods of data collection provided ingredients for rich, thick description, another measure of validity. This type of writing provides enough detail and description that the reader is able to "see" the research site and feel as if they are there with the

researcher (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Finally, within the methodology chapter I clarify my researcher lens and discuss how my background may affect my interpretations and how I will monitor this bias throughout the research experience.

TEACHER SELECTION

My original choice for a research participant was Sara Turner, the teacher whom I had worked with two years earlier as part of the independent research project mentioned previously. I spent a semester in her class collecting data on culturally relevant practices in her classroom. As a result of this work, I became involved and interested in the AVID program. I was impressed with the AVID students and with her level of commitment and dedication to the program. As I designed this study, I had Sara in mind as my sole participant. I was familiar with her philosophy of teaching, her pedagogy, and with her AVID students. The setting for my study was always a given in my mind. However, things are never simple and straightforward when it comes to a research study.

Just before I turned in my research proposal to my committee, Sara called to let me know that she had been reassigned as the AVID site coordinator and would no longer be in the classroom. She offered a reasonable solution in my mind: to have me conduct the study in the classroom of her replacement teacher, Henry Miller. I met with Henry and explained my study and what I would be doing in his classroom. He enthusiastically agreed to let me proceed as planned.

My chair approved this change and we submitted my proposal. After completing these steps, it seemed as if I were on my way to collecting data for my dissertation. However, at the suggestion of the district, my plans were altered once more.

The district suggested that I look at all the AVID teachers versus just one instructor. The class of students I had planned to observe were seniors that were familiar with the goals and routine of AVID, yet there were other levels of AVID classes and it might be interesting to see the difference. I agreed and decided to look at freshmen AVID students as well in hopes of seeing pedagogical differences between teachers of freshmen students versus a teacher of senior students. Sara contacted the other two AVID teachers who agreed to allow me to observe their classes. I met with all three participants prior to my entry into the field to discuss both my and their expectations for my role in their classrooms. At the time, all seemed agreeable to my presence and perhaps my taking on a participatory role at some point. As will be discussed later, this transition did not occur and I take full responsibility for not having negotiated my role in a more precise manner. Each of the participants will be introduced and discussed in depth within his or her individual data chapter.

HUMAN SUBJECTS

All human subjects approval was obtained both by The University of Texas at Lakewood and the school district in which I conducted my study. The

city, school, and participants have been assigned pseudonyms in order to protect the identity of the participants. Each participant signed a consent form and was given the opportunity to view the final product.

SETTING

Regis High School is located on the east side of Lakewood, Texas, a city with a population of two million people. This particular city has been primarily known for its renowned university and liberal-thinking community. In the 1990s, with the advent of the high-tech industry and other sources of money flowing into the economy, the population boomed and change occurred in the political and social climate. The change in the city is evident—the past "hippie" culture Lakewood was once famous for has dwindled considerably except for the remnants seen around the university area.

Regis High School has changed dramatically along with the city since it opened in the mid 1960s. Regis opened in 1965 in a modest community of middle-class White families. The original school population was 1,500 students, very similar to the number of students attending today. The school was officially dedicated in October of 1965 and members of the school board, city officials, and parent-teacher association representatives attended the function. The original structure cost $2.2 million to build and contained 51 doorless classrooms, a library, a cafeteria, administrative offices, and boys' and girls' gymnasiums.

Just one year later, in 1966, Regis was named school of the year by the National Council on Schoolhouse Construction ("Nation's Schools," 1966). The design was praised for its ability to air-condition each space at a mere $12 per square foot. Windows in classrooms were created small in order to meet the goal of air-conditioning each wing at a low cost. Materials were chosen for the outside that would require no maintenance; hence what I call the "ugly curtain" look was born. The outside walls are made of small stones and are rippled similar to parlor curtains in a large, formal house. The inside walls are ceramic-surfaced wainscoting and never need painting. Basically, the district was praised for building a functional school relatively quickly and at a low cost compared to others in the same city. Regis was considered by the district to be the "… most functional building in the district" ("Nation's Schools," 1966, p. 42). During the '60s, Regis remained a school of White, middle-class students.

By 1970, Regis was the largest campus in the city with 2,450 students in attendance. The school and its community thrived, academically and in extracurricular activities. Regis quickly built its football powerhouse, capturing the state title in '67, '68, '69, and '70. In 1970, African American faces appeared in the sports pages for the first time due to the city's adoption of busing as a means to integrate schools. The result of busing for Regis was that students of color, specifically African American students, now attended Regis. The headlines of the city and school papers are strewn with examples of the racial tension that

resulted from the implementation of busing (Bray, 1970; Elrod, 1970; Cox, 1972; Banta 1972, among others). The content of these newspaper articles reveals that busing was challenging on the Regis campus and tensions between African American and White students rose to damaging heights quickly after busing was implemented.

In late January of 1972, nine Regis students were injured, including two stabbed, as a result of a fight between African American and White students. White students accused African Americans of accosting them in the hallways, while African American students accused White students of picking on them. African American students were also offended by insulting terminology and obscene and vulgar language used by White teachers and staff. At least 200 students were involved in this brawl and it brought much negative attention to the high school, then barely seven years old.

In the year 2002, the faces of Regis have changed dramatically from the original class of ’65. The landscape has evolved from totally White to a mix of White and African Americans to at present a mixture of many races, dominated by Hispanic Americans. The school population is 98% minority, with 702 Hispanic, 571 African American, 47 Caucasian, 5 Asian, and 2 American Indian/Alaskan students, for a total of 1,327 students. 60% of the student population is economically disadvantaged, meaning they are eligible to receive free and reduced lunch. The state average of economically disadvantaged students

is only 50%, illustrating the extreme level of poverty present at Regis. Two hundred and ninety-one Regis students have limited English proficiency (LEP). These statistics make for challenging teaching situations, as LEP students require specialized teaching and more funding.

State reviews of the school are not favorable—in the 2001-2002 school year, the school was labeled "not recognized" in terms of school improvement in reading and math achievement test scores. Regis is considered below average when compared to district schools with similar demographics. For example, in the end of course exams in biology and English, Regis had 47% and 42% pass respectively in comparison to a similar school which had 67% and 55% pass these same exams. The state average for the biology exam is 80% and 69% for the English exam.

The school is also not recognized in academic achievement, meaning student test scores are below average when compared to schools facing similar challenges. Regis has an overall rating of "acceptable" in terms of standardized tests, attendance rates, and the like, an improvement over the preceding designations. "Acceptable" implies that 55% of the student population is passing the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test and it qualifies the school to be considered for Gold Performance acknowledgement. There is much work to be done in order to get Regis to the top tiers of this rating system, "recognized," or the ever-coveted "exemplarly" rating.

In addition, the school has a 78% attendance rate, well below that of the state's 95% rate. Meaning, on any given day, 1,070 out of 1,327 students are in attendance. The poor attendance rate is an enormous factor in the low performance rating of the school. The problem is recognized within the school as each year the principal strives for a 100% attendance day. This is talked about in classes, on announcements, and printed in the school paper. I heard several instances in which teachers told students that their low ratings were not a result of their inability to perform well academically, but of their inability to attend class. The implications are that many students miss large amounts of instruction over a school year and many drop out before making it to their senior year.

Average class size is above the state average of 21 at 26.5, meaning one teacher must attempt to give a large number of individual students attention. The teachers I worked with at Regis admitted that most classes had 25 to 30 students in them. At the high-school level, this is particularly difficult as teachers often teach at least five classes a day, meaning they see as many as 125 students per day. It is difficult for one teacher to meet the academic needs of that many students. In addition, research has shown larger classes are damaging to student achievement in many ways. Teachers with large classes have less time to devote to individual students, and less space in the classroom, often resulting in crowded, chaotic classrooms (Ferguson, 1991; Finn, 1998; Deutsch 2003).

The mobility rate at Regis is 33.2%, determined by looking at the number of students who move during the school year and have missed six or more weeks. This rate is extremely high when one looks at other schools in the district. For example, at two affluent schools in the district, the mobility rates are 15.8% and 13.4%. The average mobility rate for the state of Texas is 21%, illustrating that Regis is on the high end of students who transfer in and out of the school during an academic year. Typically, a high mobility rate equates more challenges for student achievement (Great Schools, 2004). At least one study of high-school students and mobility has found that the more a students moves from school to school, the less likely he or she is to graduate from high school (Haveman & Wolfe, 1994). This fact may contribute to the high drop-out rate at Regis and the fact that the freshmen class at this school dwindles to half its size by the time these students are seniors (S. Turner, personal communication, April, 2001).

The drop-out rate is high at 3.1% compared to the state average of 1%—a factor that contributed to the campus being labeled “low performing” by the state. To put this in perspective, out of the 1,327 students at the school, 41 students drop out annually—meaning 164 students are gone by their senior year. This is a challenge for teachers who must struggle with the reality that many of their students have complicated home situations that may take precedence over school. Because dropping out of high school is such a common occurrence at the school, teachers must work against the belief that this is a viable option for students.

The teachers represent the following ethnicities: 18 African American, 12 Hispanic, 51 Caucasian, and no Asian or Native American teachers. Surprisingly, when compared to the dismal statistics above, the teacher experience card is high. Seven are beginning teachers, 22 have 1 to 5 years of experience, 16 have 6 to 10 years, 20 have 11 to 20 years experience and 15 have more than 20 years of experience—these statistics fare well against the state and district numbers for teacher retention at various schools (AEIS 2001-2002). Research has not been able to establish a definitive link between teacher experience and student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000). However, it has shown that the most effective schools have a combination of experienced and new teachers, and create opportunities for all teachers to learn from each other (Great Schools, 2004).

In 2002, a debate ensued over the location of district administrative offices as a result of the Texas School Performance Review. Community members felt that the rent the administration paid for a downtown location was too high and sought alternatives for office space. Regis was high on the list of schools to close and use for these offices. The Texas School Performance Review recommended closing the school, using low rating and low occupancy rate to justify their argument for closing the campus and using it to house all the magnet schools as well as administrative offices. The parents and teachers at the school were very outspoken against this measure and are largely responsible for saving the school. After months of debate and voting, Dr. Ford, the school superintendent, said,

“Regis students are going places in this world—but this campus is staying right here!” He also committed at that time to work as a district to see that the school and its students would thrive. Regis was safe for now, but still wounded from the assumption that the school and its community could be dismissed that easily, as seen in the letters to the editor in the local and school papers.

The original school building is unchanged, but the campus was enlarged by the addition of a new section called the “New Mall.” It is a copy of the original building with the same square shape and classroom corridor style. The doors and ceilings on the outside of both buildings are painted baby blue. Hanging above the doorway is the school motto, “Not Without Honor.” There are four main buildings linked by sidewalks and overhangs. The original two buildings are referred to as the “Old Mall” and house freshmen classes, the library, and the computer lab. The New Mall houses upper-level classes and the cafeteria. The New Mall was in the original design per the blueprints I viewed, but it is not clear why the architectural team waited to make this addition.

The school has landscaping in the center of each building and between the four structures. There are lots of trees and bushes to soften the concrete structures that dominate the grounds. Students spend much time in the corridor between the two malls sitting on stairs and benches that surround the area. There are bulletin boards to the left of each entry door filled with school announcements, teacher

locations, and various motivational signs. To the right of each door is a staircase, as each building is two stories high and square-shaped.

Classroom hallways are located in the four corners of the square and are identified by colors above the door—a necessity so as not to lose your way, I found. Student lockers are arranged in alcoves off both levels of the central courtyards. There are five classrooms in each hallway and every attempt is made to organize the hallways by subject matter. For example, I spent most of my time in the orange and yellow hallways, which house English and History classes. Within these hallways are teacher centers, where department teachers have a common space containing a desk, storage alcove, and bulletin board. These centers also have a workroom, sink, teaching materials, and phones.

The three classrooms I worked in were of average size with four walls and two small rectangular windows covered by Venetian blinds. Interestingly, the original design of doorless classrooms was abandoned somewhere along the way and now each classroom has a door. Each teacher has approximately four bulletin boards, a dry erase board, and a chalkboard. The ceilings are square patches with bright fluorescent lighting, typical of most school classrooms. The exception is the classroom belonging to AVID seniors, which is the size of two regular classrooms and so has ample space for many computers and a large reading area. These are the general descriptions of each class; however, each teacher utilized

this space in unique ways according to his or her subject and personal taste; this will be described in more detail within the data chapters of this document.

DATA COLLECTION

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations took place from January 2003 until May 2003. These visits were scheduled for three times a week, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Tuesdays and Thursdays were tutorial days in which university students came to tutor the students and the teachers did no direct teaching on these days. I observed these tutorial sessions during the month of April to get a sense of the program as a whole and to see the students interact with the tutors.

Observations lasted the length of each AVID class, which was 45 minutes in duration. During the semester, I visited two of the classrooms approximately 60 times and the third classroom 20 times. The discrepancy in the third class was a result of schedule conflicts. The senior- and freshmen-level courses meet simultaneously, so I had to make a choice about which one to see more often. I chose the senior class because the other two were freshmen classes and I felt that I could collect different types of data based on the level of students in the class. In addition, I had a personal interest in the seniors, as they were the sophomores I observed two years ago; I knew them and their teacher whereas I did not know the freshmen teachers. I knew that my comfort level in this class and with this

particular teacher would be high and would enhance my ability to interact with the students and teacher.

My observations consisted of watching each teacher instruct and interact with his or her students. Initially, I wrote down everything that happened in the room. I recorded who entered the room, the teacher's response to them, and the dialogue, if any, that occurred. I soon discovered that recording everything was not efficient, nor did it help me to focus on my question. I weaned myself from this process and limited my jottings to instances of teacher pedagogy and teacher/student relationship examples only. For example, I recorded the way in which Kris taught her students how to take Cornell notes, a specific note-taking system that AVID students use in their courses. I also recorded Henry's conversations with his students and noted the methods by which my participants chose to convey information to the students.

As I moved forward in my research, it became clear that my desired participant-observer role would not surface. My original intent was to become a participant observer, taking an active role in the classroom; however, this vision never panned out. I cannot explain why this transition did not occur. In one classroom, it was made very clear to me by the teacher that an active role would not be welcome. The words were not explicit, but the actions and indirect comments told me to stay seated and observe. In the other two rooms the teachers seemed like they were not sure what to do with me; they would not mind my help,

but did not want to impose on my work. Admittedly, I should have done a better job of negotiating my role prior to entering the field. I initially met with each teacher separately and discussed my role in the class. All seemed very open to me participating as much as possible; however, either I did a poor job of asserting myself or the teachers were so accustomed to teaching solo that it did not occur to them to include me. Whatever the cause, I decided to back off from trying to participate and began to observe the teachers and interact with students when the occasion presented itself.

The choice to be an observer versus a participant observer was never explicitly stated, but it appeared to me that all of the teachers appeared comfortable with me in that role. As I became more familiar with my environment, my interaction with teachers and students increased. I enjoyed circulating the room and talking to the students, when appropriate. I made jottings discreetly and then expanded these immediately after observation hours. This felt less intrusive and I was able to get to know the students and the teachers better this way. At the end of each observation day, I sat and recorded the events and my interpretations of those events in my spiral notebooks. I had a separate notebook for each class: Kris was green, Kay was blue, and Henry was maroon.

Field Note Transcription

I transferred my written notes from my color-coded spirals to my computer before I went to Regis each day. The notes were usually at least a day

old, which worked for me because I had time to ponder and reconsider what I had seen. I am aware that this practice goes against Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (1995) advice: "Writing fieldnotes *immediately* after leaving the setting produces fresher, more detailed recollections that harness the ethnographer's involvement with and excitement about the day's events" (p. 40). For me, the time was built in before class because I dropped my kids off at school and had time to work before the first AVID class began. In addition, I preferred this method because it refreshed my memory as to what I had seen during my last observation session and helped to focus my attention for the coming day. Typically, I used this time to elaborate on daily events and couch them in terms of my research question. I tried to identify themes across classroom and between teachers and students. Invariably what I found was that these teachers and their students were so different that I could not think of it in terms of comparing them at all; my dissertation would definitely tell three separate stories. After this realization, I was able to steer my notes and my thoughts away from a comparison and focus instead on how each teacher's practice could answer my research questions.

As I transferred written notes to my computer, I also filtered comments that I knew I would not include in the final document, such as, " She treats her students with such inconsistency." My judgmental comments needed to be vented, but only within the confines of my personal jottings, a place that only I will ever see and one where I can pick and choose what to include. I learned that it is

impossible, at least for me, to not record instances in which I disagreed with the teacher's tactics. I included these comments as data, but did not include them in the final dissertation, as my purpose is not to evaluate and judge within this piece of work.

Teacher Interviews

In order to prepare for my interviews, I relied on information from the *Handbook of Interview Research*, specifically Warren's chapter on qualitative interviewing (Warren, 2002). My purpose in the interviews was to generate further information about what I observed and to represent my participants' perspectives within my work. Two interviews with each participant were held on campus at a time and place convenient for each teacher. Typically, we met in their classrooms during their conference or lunch hour. My interviews had tentative questions and a general direction, but were created largely as the interview progressed. My goal was to engage in good conversation with each teacher and ask questions that came up during the course of our visit. For this reason, I chose not to take notes during the interview, but to rely on an audio recording. This was a bit risky as there is always a chance for technical difficulties, but I chose this method despite that risk because I felt it was important to put all of my attention on the teacher and really listen to his or her responses.

The initial teacher interviews were held approximately three weeks into the study and focused on the teachers' personal and professional backgrounds as

well as what brought them to the AVID program. Without prompting, each of the teachers also explained to me what brought them to the teaching profession. I inquired about future career plans and where they wanted to go with the program. This was also the interview in which I asked questions about the program that my reading had not answered. I wanted to know specifically about how Regis implemented the AVID program on its campus. Toward the end of the interviews, I asked about their personal teaching styles based on tactics I had observed. For example, one teacher did no direct teaching while the other two engaged in it almost exclusively. I inquired as to their reasons for these pedagogical choices. I asked about long-term statistics on students; were they performing up to the level expected by AVID? This interview provided a general picture of each teacher's philosophy on teaching and on AVID. It also gave them the opportunity to ask any questions about my role or my work. As previously mentioned, I had been thrust into their rooms with little explanation or notice.

The second set of teacher interviews were three months into my work and at this point I had enough data to inquire about specific observations I had made. My questions were generated from direct observation—I would highlight inquiries as I made jottings during class or within my typed notes. I had recently been allowed to sit in on interviews of students for next year's AVID classes and had a lot of questions about what I saw during that process. I wanted to know about those who did not get accepted or dropped the program voluntarily—why

did this happen? How often? What did the teacher feel his or her role was in this process? I focused on the difference in teaching styles that I observed in the freshmen classes versus the senior class. I discovered that the teachers saw the main difference as being the maturity level of the students rather than any differences in their teaching styles and abilites. We discussed how AVID permeated the campus as a whole and affected other teachers' teaching practices. This interview also focused on a tragic incident that occurred during my research study just a week prior to the scheduled interviews. This incident is discussed in detail within this work, but suffice it to say that we spent a great deal of time discussing that tragedy, the teachers' emotional states, and the students' reactions and responses.

Originally, I anticipated interviewing the teachers a third time after I attended the AVID summer training. Two things happened that caused me to change my mind. One, after reading through the data and writing about each teacher, I felt I had sufficient and varied examples of their perspectives. Second, AVID training, discussed in detail later within this chapter, provided basics about the program and how to institute it within a school. I felt that interviewing Sara, the AVID coordinator, would be more beneficial to me at this point. I generated lots of questions about how the AVID program at Regis was instituted and how it had generated such positive results in a relatively short amount of time. In addition, I learned about the pivotal role the AVID coordinator plays in the life of

the program and decided to talk to Sara and discover more about her role in assisting her teachers.

Each hour-long interview was taped and transcribed and I offered participants a copy of interview transcriptions. Two of the three participants chose to read the hard copy. One participant elaborated in writing on some comments made during the interview while the other was satisfied with the content and made no comments. I retyped these based on her comments and then coded the interview transcripts with the observation data, continuing to look for common themes in teaching practices among the three AVID teachers.

AVID SUMMER INSTITUTE

My final means for data collection was to attend the AVID summer institute, titled "Shaping the American Dream," on June 25-29, 2003 in Lakewood, Texas. My purpose in going was to gain firsthand knowledge of the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of AVID and to discover the ways in which these are communicated to future AVID teachers. I knew that my participants had attended this same training and so I felt it was important that I become aware of the information that they had been exposed to as new AVID teachers. The AVID coordinator at the administration office, Melanie Grant, and the state coordinator had allowed me to attend the conference for purposes of conducting research. Ms. Grant's job with the school district is to coordinate AVID programs on all campuses. She is responsible for holding site team meetings on each campus,

handling budget and personnel concerns, and other items that directly pertain to implementing AVID in schools.

During the introductory session, Ms. Grant introduced general AVID principles, curriculum, and philosophy to the AVID teachers from the Lakewood area high schools. She talked about the founder, Mary Catherine Swanson, and how her single classroom of students had grown into a national program. A large portion of Ms. Grant's presentation focused on funding and how Lakewood had been given a huge grant to make sure that all high schools had AVID available to them. This money ensured that all middle schools would have a feeder school so that students could stay in the program from 7th until 12th grade. The key to funding, according to Ms. Grant, is to "have full classes, get AVID kids into honors courses and taking advanced placement exams."

Ms. Grant briefly described some essential elements that must be present to enact AVID on a campus. One of these, the importance of the site team, seemed to be her focus for this meeting. The creation and maintenance of AVID

> … requires the collaboration of an active interdisciplinary site team to understand and address the issues of student access to and success in rigorous college preparatory courses. The AVID site team minimally should include the AVID site coordinator, academic subject area lead teachers and head counselor or an academic counselor, a site administrator, and representative AVID students. This site team develops

> and implements a site plan, and documents evidence to illustrate support for students' access to and success in rigorous curriculum. (*Shaping the American Dream,* 2003, p. 46)

Without the site team, AVID does not have the needed support to function well and infiltrate entire schools, one of its explicit goals. This team must keep data on AVID students, an important part of illustrating the success of the program. Ms. Grant spent a great deal of time getting the teachers to sign up for monthly site team meetings, and she stressed the importance of communication between campuses and the district.

Following this session, the state AVID coordinator along with a noted journalist made the keynote address. It was a pep rally of sorts, with lots of statistics shared to illustrate the success of the program. The amazing part of this meeting was the number of people in attendance. A huge conference room was filled with teachers either learning about AVID for the first time or refining their skills. It hit me for the first time how huge this program is. I have tended to view it in terms of the school I worked in or the city I live in, but this program has grown to include many parts of the United States. The keynote speaker made the statement "people assume that kids from certain backgrounds cannot achieve at that high level—AVID goes against this traditional train of thought" (Mathews, 2003). I was in awe of the number of people present who were committed to this idea; it gave me a glimmer of hope for the students who have traditionally been

denied equal access to education. An idea that Mary Catherine Swanson implemented in her small classroom has grown into a phenomenon and a change in the mindset of many educators.

Each day for five days I attended a session entitled Implementation Strand at the High School Level. This room of educators turned out to be new teachers to the program from Texas, Colorado, and Washington State. These teachers had either had limited experience with the program or no experience at all. This was the perfect session for my purposes as it would discuss how to get a program started and more thoroughly explain the methods used in an AVID classroom. The presenters were Joyce Suber and Mary Contreras, coordinators in the San Diego AVID office. Their basic approach seemed to be to present the general principles of AVID, provide hands-on experience with instructional techniques unique to AVID, and allow for lots of questions.

These instructors stated that one of the ultimate goals of AVID is to see that each student enrolled in the program applies to and is accepted into a four-year university. In addition, AVID seeks to open the doors to advanced courses for traditionally underrepresented students. They reiterated the idea that participants must be involved voluntarily, both teachers and students, and that a strong site team must be in place for AVID to succeed at a school.

During these five days, teachers were introduced to the AVID practices of Cornell notes, AVID notebooks, specific discussion techniques, and processes for

collecting and reporting data on AVID students. In addition, there was an entire day devoted to pouring over curriculum guides to learn about the objectives and practices that the program is based on. We spent a lot of time as students, practicing these techniques and then discussing them in groups to make sure that we understood. It struck me that we looked a lot like the AVID classes I had worked with, taking notes on presentations, working collaboratively, and generating questions in order to learn more.

The crux of AVID training was to understand one of its main acronyms — WIC—writing, inquiry, and collaboration. These elements will be explored and illustrated within chapter four. As we discussed AVID implementation, I began to understand the vast amount of work involved in getting the program started on a campus. While it all looks good on paper, it is overwhelming to think about going into a school and implementing this all from scratch. Although the presenters had used hands-on techniques to teach us, it was difficult to imagine these practices going over as smoothly with a group of high-school students. Ms. Suber and Ms. Contreras repeatedly remarked, “this all takes time, give yourselves a good year to get all the essentials in place, and longer to see visible results.”

After completing AVID training, my respect and admiration for my research participants grew exponentially. All the things I had learned within training about the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of AVID were in place in the AVID classrooms at Regis. The competent program in place at Regis is amazing

considering that AVID has only been in place at Regis for four years. For me, the manifestation of AVID at Regis demonstrated the importance of having committed teachers who believe in AVID, and in their students, involved in its conception and implementation.

DATA ANALYSIS

The procedures I chose to follow in analyzing data largely relied on Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's 1995 *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. I used this book because it provides step-by-step instructions on how to begin analyzing data and provided a guidepost as I sifted through my research data. I also referred frequently to Glesne's *Becoming Qualitative Researchers* (Glesne, 1999) and Darlington & Scott's *Qualitative Research in Practice* (Darlington & Scott, 2002). It is important to note that I participated daily in analysis throughout the course of the study as I observed and transcribed fieldnotes. The first step in synthesizing the vast amount of data I had accumulated involved reading the transcribed notes repeatedly. I engaged in close readings designed to utilize a "… line by line categorization of specific notes" (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, p. 143). Initially, I unconsciously searched for commonalities across classrooms in terms of pedagogy practiced and themes discussed in interviews. I followed the advice in the aforementioned book by framing questions "… that get at how members see and experience events, at what they view as important and significant, at how they describe, classify, analyze, and evaluate their own and others' situations and

activities" (p. 147). In addition, I asked the question, "why did I include this in my fieldnotes?" The answer to this query enabled me to view the dichotomy between my and my members' meaning of events.

The bulk of my data analysis occurred after I attended the AVID conference. I felt my coding would be more focused after I learned about stated AVID goals and techniques per the program leaders. Learning about what the classroom was supposed to look like would allow me to find instances in my notes where this occurred as well as instances in which it did not. I discovered that Regis was extremely accurate in their application of AVID. I then revisited the notes and began to code examples of pedagogical practices within the classroom and references to pedagogy within interviews, paying close attention to "… what seems significant to members, whether it is what they think is key, what looks to be practically important, or what engages a lot of their time and energy" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, p. 157). I then made copies of my data to mark up and identified emerging themes within.

As themes emerged, I wrote them down on a piece of notebook paper. I separated observation notes from interview transcripts and summer institute notes, and then re-read over the themes to look for commonalities. I narrowed down the field to five themes that I saw repeated throughout the data for each teacher: caring, flexibility, voluntary participation, high expectations, and personal

responsibility. These themes are presented in detail within the data chapters where I discuss how they are manifested in each classroom.

Next came the task of highlighting examples of each of the five themes within the written data. I had a color for each theme so I could go back and cut out the excerpts. I placed these excerpts on note cards and put like-themed data in one stack, keeping a hard copy of the original notes for later use. I then searched for connections between the themes and used these as a guide for how to tell my story. As I reviewed the initial themes, I made notes to myself concerning how I could link the themes for my expanded audience to understand. It was in this step that I began to imagine the data as a whole and how it might look in written format. I attempted to follow Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's advice to "… select out some incidents and events, give them priority, and comes to understand them in relationship to others" (p. 168). In completing these steps, I was able to begin conceptualizing what the study would look like as an organized piece of work and how I could portray it to a larger audience.

LIMITATIONS

As with any research, my study has limitations that must be discussed. First and foremost, a study of three classrooms cannot purport to represent a national program such as AVID. In AVID training, I discovered the far-reaching effect of AVID—it is national, plus there were thousands of teachers present and it was only one of four institutes held in the summer of 2003. My study has to be

understood as an ethnography of three teachers' implementation of AVID at one high school. My results will not be applicable to all AVID classrooms. More comprehensive results could be gleaned from looking at teacher pedagogy in AVID in different schools and/or different states. The program gives freedom to teachers to implement AVID essentials in response to the needs of their students. As a result, it is likely to look different in any given classroom.

The second limitation involves my research participants. Although cooperative, they participated largely as a result of their coordinator asking them to be a part of this study. They likely have an interest in my research; however, they were there largely because their direct supervisor asked them to participate. A similar study may fare better if teachers are recruited from a larger group of AVID teachers who volunteer to be part of a research study. These volunteers could be interviewed to evaluate their fit with the intent of the study. Using this method, the researcher may feel less intrusive and be able to collaborate more with the participants.

Now that I have detailed the specific methodological approach to my study, I will turn my attention to the AVID program, discussing its premise, focus, history, structure, and implementation. In the following chapter, I will also begin to discuss the AVID principles of writing, inquiry, and collaboration in terms of how each of my participants utilizes these within his or her classroom.

CHAPTER FOUR

AVID: In Theory and in Practice

The AVID program attempts to make opportunities in education equal for students of color and to provide information about how to gain entry into the dominant culture that White students in more affluent districts have had access to their entire lives. Students are taught the rules of the dominant culture and how to operate successfully within this culture without sacrificing their ethnic identities (Mehan et al., 1996; Delpit, 1988; Gay, 2000). AVID creates what Freire (1973) and (Giroux, 1983a) refer to as "transformative education" by providing opportunities for students to discuss and critique social reality through an open dialogue between students and teachers. AVID moves beyond academics and includes an examination of social systems and the opportunity for change. Schools tend to reward teachers who maintain the status quo within their classrooms (Trueba, 1989). AVID counters this trend by encouraging teachers and students to debate societal norms in an effort to change them.

HISTORY

Two major studies on the history, philosophy, and results of AVID exist (Mehan, et al., 1996; Freedman, 2000). Because these are the only two sources of this type on the AVID program, I have drawn from them heavily in constructing this chapter. AVID was created and designed in 1980 by Mary

> Catherine Swanson, a teacher at Clairemont High School in the state of California. She created the program after busing was enacted at her affluent, all-White school. Her colleagues either tracked students of color into low-level classes or transferred to other schools before the students were bused in. In opposition to this trend, she chose to stay at Clairemont and to teach her supposed "low-level" students as she taught other students, combining high expectations with real-life skills, such as how to apply and get accepted to college. Thus, AVID was born and Mary Catherine Swanson was doing the unthinkable during this time period: instituting "teacher-based reform" (Freedman, 2000, p. 33).

Ms. Swanson wisely kept data files on each of her beginning students, sensing that this would be important later. The first few months of the program were difficult and her students struggled to make Cs in their advanced courses. The program was improved through introduction of a formal note-taking system and training college-student tutors to engage students in inquiry versus providing answers to student questions. By the end of the first academic year, students in AVID were not yet caught up to their peers, but their grades had improved enough for the other teachers and administrators to take notice of the program. As news of the success of the program spread, teachers at other schools contacted Mary Catherine to ask how she had attained such results.

By 1986, 170 AVID students had graduated and were now attending

various universities (Freedman, 2000). At the end of that year, Mary Catherine decided to leave Clairemont, partly for personal reasons, but also to attempt to help a larger number of students attain academic success through dissemination of the AVID program. She received a grant that allowed her to work at the county level and introduce AVID to all the schools in that county. Her pilot program of eight schools within the district grew steadily. The students in AVID continued to achieve at levels that before had been thought beyond the reach of these students. During the dissemination phase of AVID, Mary Catherine learned an invaluable lesson that became a cornerstone of AVID: "AVID could not be forced on a student, teacher, or school. It depended on participants making a choice to take the risk of becoming involved. There could be no advancement without individual determination" (Freedman, 2000, p. 262). This premise is still valid in AVID programs today; AVID is a completely voluntary program, which makes for motivated participants who work hard to see the program succeed.

The news that "average" students of color were performing well in honors courses and attending college spread throughout the district and city quickly. So many teachers flooded Mary Catherine's office with calls of inquiry that she decided to have a summer training session, thus the first summer institute was born in 1986. As AVID was recognized by the city, media, and beyond, the program expanded largely by word of mouth. All of

that changed in 1992, when a Kentucky administrator contacted Mary Catherine to implement AVID in his state. Soon, a not-for-profit corporation was established to oversee the implementation of AVID in other states. A turning point for AVID was the publication of *Constructing School Success* by Hugh Mehan. Dr. Mehan and a team of researchers observed AVID in classrooms and interviewed teachers and students in AVID to demonstrate an example of successful untracking practices in schools (Freedman, 2000). His conclusions

> … praised AVID's "hidden curriculum" that taught minority students how to operate effectively in schools and lauded AVID's 'social scaffolding' that supported kids to overcome obstacles of poverty and alienation. (Freedman, 2000, p. 299)

This publication propelled AVID into further expansion by widening its exposure and highlighting the positive changes AVID can make on a school campus.

Since that time, the program has expanded to include 24 states within the United States as well as 14 other countries (*Shaping the American Dream,* 2003). Schools that have implemented AVID have shown continued success in providing access to advanced courses and increasing college attendance rates for students of color. As of 1999, 95% of AVID graduates are enrolled in a college or university. (*Shaping the American Dream*, 2003) The model is

based on the belief that all students, regardless of income level or ethnicity, can master high-level material when taught with high expectations and increased learning opportunities (*Tools for Schools*, 1998). AVID defies the assumptions of deficit models because it assumes the problems in student achievement lie within the school system and not within the student. The program is regarded by some as a model for allowing students of color to achieve academic success in an accelerated curriculum, a practice sometimes referred to as "untracking" (Mehan et al., 1996, *Tools for Schools*, 1998).

STRUCTURE

Nationally, AVID students are self-selected, meaning they choose to be in the program after being identified by teams of teachers. Eligibility takes into account the following attributes of each student: average to high achievement-test scores and C-level grades, students who would be the first in their family to attend college, and students from demographic groups which have traditionally been underrepresented in honors courses and in colleges.

Students are enrolled in a special elective class that meets once a day and follows a predictable routine each week. The AVID class is designed to provide the academic support each student needs. It is within this classroom that students receive social supports and access to the "hidden curriculum" of the school. Teachers become "…mediators who intervene on their behalf within the high school…" (Mehan et al., 1996, p. 83).

The classroom is enhanced by the presence of college tutors on a 7:1 tutor-student ratio. These tutors volunteer for the position and many times are recruited by AVID teachers from a pool of former AVID students now in college. Tutors are trained by the regional AVID office and receive instruction and materials on the methodologies specific to AVID—writing, inquiry, and collaboration (*Shaping the American Dream*, 2003). These tutors are paid for their work and the money comes out of the district and/or campus AVID budget. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, college tutors come in and assist with questions students have in their academic classes. The importance of the tutors cannot be understated:

> It is very effective for AVID students to work with college students who actively embrace the philosophy of the program and daily use of the learning and study techniques being taught. In addition to providing academic support, the college students are powerful role models who promote the development of an academic identity among AVID students. (*Shaping the American Dream*, 2003, p. 45)

Within AVID training, the fact that AVID does not exist without the presence of these tutors was pointed out repeatedly.

Another important part of the AVID program is parent support; students who elect to enroll are required to have a contract signed by parents as a show of support for their participation in the program. AVID operates on the premise

that enrolled students and their parents care about and are actively involved in their education. This philosophy is a complete reversal from deficit models, which encompass the myth that "… low-income parents of color typically do not value the importance of education, fail to inculcate such a value in their children, and seldom participate—through parental involvement activities—in the education of their offspring" (Valencia, 1997, p. 190). AVID stands out from many programs in its desire to involve parents in the education of their children.

Problematic within this requirement has been the tendency of high-school students' parents to be less involved than parents in the younger grades and the fact that parental involvement has been defined by White, middle-class parents.

> The strategy deployed by working class parents – trusting teachers to educate their children – did not promote success. The strategy deployed by middle-income parents – actively participating in supervising, monitoring, and overseeing their children's schooling – promoted success. (Mehan et al., 1996, p. 162)

In a study conducted by Mehan, he interviewed AVID parents and found that they participated in their child's education in more subtle ways, by providing a place to study and supporting and encouraging their children in academic endeavors versus being visible at the school. Mehan asserts that much more can be done in the area of parental involvement and that as it stands, "… the

program is acting on behalf of parents, performing services for students in the place of parents" (1996, p. 176). Still, the desire is present for parents to become as involved as they want to be and, in my study, I often observed teachers who talked to students' parents frequently and were familiar with the home lives of their students.

AVID, as a program created in a classroom versus one mandated by the district, offers a unique opportunity for teachers' voices to be heard in an arena where they are typically given little power (Mehan et. al., 1996). Teachers in the program are given latitude to determine their students' needs and respond accordingly. Although they follow a basic structure, they are not bound to formulaic teaching patterns or adherence to standardized-test preparation. The goal for AVID teachers is to move away from providing teacher-centered instruction and more toward becoming managers of learning. The AVID teacher is a facilitator, but the actual responsibility for learning rests with the students (Swanson, 1996). Teachers are trained and encouraged to utilize collaborative learning within their instruction as a way to teach students how to take responsibility for their own learning rather than relying on the teacher (Mehan et al., 1996).

AVID is an important program for analysis because it is an example of a program that allows underrepresented students to cross academic borders; they are given access to honors courses and aided in performing well in those courses

through the use of social and academic support within AVID. As a whole, schools are rigid places, resistant to change and full of teachers willing to conform to established norms (Binder, 2000). AVID challenges accepted beliefs about the ability of students of color and employs teachers who are willing to believe in students who have been largely dismissed by our system. These teachers work against established norms to see that every student has a chance to do well in school. Mary Catherine Swanson created AVID in reaction to her disdain for how schools and teachers treated children of color. Her belief that these students could succeed in a changed curriculum and with new methodology led to its realization and success.

CREATING AVID

A necessary requirement for beginning an AVID program is money. It takes approximately $2,500 for the first year, which includes the AVID curriculum books and is paid for by grants, district money, and other sources, depending on the school district. Regis was able to get this money through Title 5, which provides grant money for new and innovative programs. Establishing AVID principles involves training teachers to implement the curriculum. This training comes via summer institutes held each year in different locales throughout the country. In the year 2003, four institutes were held in Texas, Atlanta, and Georgia, and two were held in California. Typically, a team is sent from each AVID school consisting of the principal, a

counselor, the AVID coordinator, and teachers from the English, foreign language, history, science, and mathematics departments.

The summer institute teaches these school teams how to utilize the core principles of AVID, "… writing to learn, inquiry, and collaboration" (Mehan et al., 1996, p. 16), all of which are described later in this chapter. Afterwards, the team meets once a month during the school year for AVID workshops, semiannually for team meetings, and is visited by AVID center staff semiannually (Mehan et al., 1996). Each school has a year and a half to establish the program and then an AVID program evaluator makes a site visit to determine if the school will be a certified AVID site. The standards used to qualify a school as certified must be maintained in order for a school to retain its certification (S. Turner, personal communication, February 15, 2004). Ideally, a campus commits to AVID for four years; it usually takes this long to implement the program and see results. Regis will be up for certification in the 2004-2005 school year.

The effort to implement AVID in a school is not a solo one; many people are involved in getting it started and seeing that it continues to benefit students. Teachers and administrators must be committed to the idea of untracking for AVID-qualified students and work together to identify potential participants, both students and teachers.

AVID arrived at Regis through a grant from Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD). The school district chose AVID over other programs after visiting AVID demonstration sites in California. Regis was chosen as an AVID site due to its status as a "Title One" school. Title One is the largest federal grant in existence that provides money to improve the education of students labeled at-risk for school failure (Archived Information, 2004). This grant originally paid for AVID to be implemented in four high schools and four middle schools for three years. Regis began its AVID program five years ago with 8 students and today has 120 students and is applying this year to become a national demonstration school (M. Tobia, personal communication, February 1, 2004).

When the initial money runs out, AVID sites will have hopefully proven their worth, and it is expected that the individual campuses will begin to take on some of the financial responsibility. Fortunately for the Lakewood Independent School District, a local business foundation has provided money to implement three sections of AVID on each high-school campus. This is not quite enough funding for the large program at Regis, so the school pays for the rest through its local budget, a gesture demonstrating the campus' belief in the program (S. Turner, personal communication, February 16, 2004).

A LOOK AT AVID PRACTITIONERS

In this study, I observed three AVID teachers working at the same school. Henry worked with seniors; Kris and Kay worked with freshmen. The practices of each of these teachers will be depicted and discussed in depth in the following chapters. Before we turn to examining each teacher individually, I would like to briefly look at the ways in which these three teachers enacted the AVID principles of writing, inquiry, and collaboration as tools for learning. Each participant enacted these AVID principles in a way that was well aligned with the goals of the program.

Writing in AVID refers to following the formal steps for an essay: prewrite, draft, respond, revise, edit, and final draft. Students are taught how to go through each of these steps in order to strengthen their writing skills. Writing also includes a formula for taking class and textbook notes, called Cornell notes. AVID adopted this already existing note-taking format as a way to improve student study skills. This note-taking style differs from others in that students are required to summarize content in their own words on one side of the paper and then come up with guiding questions about their notes on the opposite side of the paper. These notes are reviewed by the AVID teacher and are often used within AVID tutorial sessions. Finally, writing in the AVID classroom involves keeping a learning log and/or journal. The learning log is used in conjunction with Cornell

notes and includes thoughts, ideas, or questions students generate in their classes. These are used for topics of discussion in tutorials and/or collaborative groups.

Inquiry in AVID is the mastery of skilled questioning techniques, class discussions, critical thinking activities, and writing questions. AVID teachers spend large amounts of time teaching their students how to ask good questions, ones that move beyond "yes" and "no" answers and into the realm of higher-level thinking. The goal of inquiry is to teach students how to think for themselves and have control over their own learning. The mastery of inquiry is essential in making sure that tutorial sessions in AVID are put to good use and that students can work together in groups to solve a problem.

Collaborative grouping is a hallmark of an AVID classroom and builds upon the goal of inquiry to make students responsible for their own learning. Collaborative groups work together to create positive interdependence and shared responsibility for one another. This practice helps to foster the sense of community that AVID aims to create. The expectation by teachers is that students should be engaging in analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of subject matter. Individual accountability is present as well, as teachers often sit in on group work and require learning logs to be turned in at the end of a group work session.

All three teachers practiced the AVID principles of writing as a tool for learning, inquiry, and collaboration. These methods are "… about allowing almost all students to have access to a rigorous college preparatory curriculum" (*Shaping*

the American Dream, 2003, p. 1). Each of my participants was trained in these particular methods and all were teaching within the structured context of the program, which resulted in many similarities. Looking at their work simultaneously will offer an opportunity to better understand how the AVID principles of writing, inquiry, and collaboration play out in individual classrooms.

AVID PRINCIPLES

Writing as a Tool for Learning

Two of the three AVID instructors participating in this study were also English teachers and so writing as a tool for learning was explicit within their teaching style and pedagogy. For the third, a math teacher, it was admittedly more difficult: "I am not an English teacher and sometimes feel that I am not the best person to be teaching them how to write" (K. Stewart, personal communication, April 16, 2003). Writing is used in an AVID classroom in three ways: note-taking, learning logs, and essay-writing.

Note-taking in the form of Cornell notes was present in two of the three classrooms. Simply stated, Cornell Notes require students to take "… detailed notes from class lectures and texts in a wide right-hand margin and develop clarifying ideas or questions regarding those notes in a narrow left-hand margin" (*Shaping the American Dream*, 2003, p. 10). These notes serve to alert the AVID teacher of attendance in classes, comprehension of subject material, and engagement of student with the subject (*Shaping the American Dream*, 2003).

In both freshmen classes, these notes had to be present in the notebooks students turned in each Friday. As the notebooks were graded, I heard the teachers ask, “Where are your Cornell notes?” or, “Why don’t you have Cornell notes for [a particular subject]?” Both freshmen teachers monitored the notebooks regularly and thoroughly as well as used them in AVID instruction. During oral presentations and lectures, freshmen AVID students were required to take Cornell notes while listening.

Another way AVID classrooms use writing as a tool for learning is when students compose essays and research papers. Each of the AVID teachers in my study required essay writing of their students at least once during the course of my study.

The writing process not only encompassed essay-writing but also the production of Power Point slides. Students had to come up with informative slides on their topics. AVID teachers followed writing-process guidelines by having students make drafts of their slides first and then peer-edit them before placing them on final slides. In addition, final slides were edited before they were shown to the class; thus, students looked at the slides at least three times before making final choices as to what would be on them. A life-goals essay is required for freshmen AVID students in the Lakewood Independent School District. For this assignment, students engaged in prewriting, drafting, editing, correcting, final draft, and publication. Each step was reviewed in class and closely monitored by

the AVID teacher—students were made aware of the writing stages as they proceeded through them.

Senior-level students engaged in the writing process in their completion of a research paper meant to prepare them for college-level research and writing. Each step of research was reviewed by the teacher who made sure students knew how to cite references correctly and how to make use of research facilities in the library. The writing guidelines were clear and adapted from an English 101 syllabus from the local university. The students were left to outline, draft, edit, and produce final drafts on their own, but were free to approach their teacher with questions, which many did during the class time allotted to work on the papers.

Inquiry

Inquiry refers to the questions students ask within thier collaborative groups. Inquiry in terms of AVID seeks to "… immediately engage students with their own thinking processes. In other words, it teaches students to think for themselves instead of chasing the Right Answer" (training manual, 2003, p. 4). In all three classrooms, I witnessed examples of inquiry within the tutorial process.

Students were engaged in inquiry when they asked questions beginning with how and why, actively exploring different avenues for generating answers. I overheard a tutor ask, "What are three ways we can get to that answer?" and watched as students came up with various methods of inquiry, first on paper and then out loud after everyone in the group was finished. The tutors were adept at

getting 100% participation from their groups, often calling on students reluctant to talk. Students were skilled in the inquiry process and required only limited intervention from their AVID teacher.

Students in the 12th-grade classroom were able to participate without prodding, and groups were formed quickly and without the commotion seen in the freshmen rooms. Many students I observed appeared to be focused on math as three of the four groups were working on math concepts. The AVID teacher typically worked with those who needed help in his or her core teaching area, sitting at a table and reviewing the writing process or proofreading essays. The AVID training manual (2003) reminds its readers, "Remember, it takes time and practice for students to learn to work effectively in collaborative learning groups" (*Shaping the American Dream*, p. 3). The seniors appeared to have mastered this skill as they used their time wisely and left the group with their questions answered.

AVID teachers in the 9th grade classroom took the time to review Bloom's taxonomy with the students so that they could sharpen their questioning skills. As they reviewed the levels, students began to call out questions, which were placed on the overhead projector in the appropriate box. The appropriate types of questions to ask were discussed, which eliminated the practice of bringing simple questions to tutorials. After this reminder, students returned to tutorials with thought-provoking, multi-leveled questions.

Overall, inquiry was used effectively in all three classrooms, with the freshmen teachers having to monitor their students a little more carefully. All three classrooms avoided giving answers to their students, fulfilling the AVID goal of providing " student ownership for enlarged understanding of concepts and values" (*Shaping the American Dream*, 2003, p. 4). The students in these AVID classrooms knew how to generate effective questions and come up with multiple ways to seek answers. Learning to master inquiry helps them to succeed in college preparatory classes, teaching them how to think for themselves and how to effectively work with others to solve a problem.

Collaboration

AVID uses collaborative groups versus cooperative groups, with the variation between the two being simply a difference in protocol. Cooperative groups have specific organizational rules that collaborative groups do not follow (*Shaping the American Dream*, 2003). Rather, collaborative groups in AVID work to "bring students together to take responsibility for their own learning. In small groups they ask, explore, and discover ideas and remember them because they are actively involved with them" (*Shaping theAmerican Dream* , 2003, p1). The focus is on shared learning and participation, and unlike cooperative learning, the structure is fluid and open to change based on the needs of the students.

Each of my participants put these ideas into practice during tutorials, which were held each Tuesday and Thursday. In a study on AVID, researchers were stunned to find the following:

> A key finding – and one that we did not necessarily expect – was that each of the eight programs followed the AVID design almost to the letter. Their adherence to AVID program design was perhaps most evident in the way AVID tutorials operated-*exactly* as described in AVID documents. (Guthrie & Guthrie, 2002, p. 24)

Tutorials are designed specifically to provide continuity between classrooms, so each year students know the format of tutorials, asking questions that guide the students toward solutions and answers, and the concept does not need to be taught again each year.

Tutorials allow students to self-select their groups. In each AVID classroom, students were able to choose which academic courses they needed to work on during tutorial time. For instance, there was a geometry group, history group, biology group, and so on. Each group had a college tutor or their AVID teacher as a leader of the group process. The students were responsible for bringing in questions on their topic; these questions were required to be at the level of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation rather than simple questions with yes and no answers. The tutors are trained to ask questions of the students to generate their thinking and get them to seek the answer through inquiry. Tutors are not to

provide solutions for the students; rather, they are to use inquiry methods to get students to reach the answer on their own.

My observation of this process was limited to one month within each classroom. In all three classrooms, tutorials have the potential to look like complete chaos to the untrained eye. The AVID teachers are orchestrating things, but not really directly involved. The students enter and move desks into various circles and sit down. Approximately five to six tutors enter the room together and begin to choose circles of desks and call out subject matter, " I am biology" or, "Algebra is over here." Students scurry to various desks as they hear their subject choice called out. Teachers move around each circle of desks and begin checking questions, making sure that each student has come to class with at least five questions on their subject matter.

It takes approximately 5 to 10 minutes to get organized and then the groups begin to work. Questions are called out and the tutor asks questions to get students thinking about how to solve the problem. AVID teachers monitor progress and join various groups as needed. In classrooms that have been participating in tutorials over a period of years, the groups were organized more quickly and the movement was less noisy and chaotic. Differences in the quality of tutorials were present and usually a manifestation of the differing experience levels between freshmen and senior students.

Collaboration seeks to engage students in the learning process, so that they discover together answers and generate more questions about a particular topic. Tutorials are an illustration of the collaborative process in which students, with their tutors and teachers, work together to discover and inquire.

Each of the AVID teachers I worked with employed the AVID principles of writing as a tool for learning, inquiry, and collaborative groups. These are three among many principles taught at AVID training and a significant amount of time is devoted to each of them. They define a classroom as an AVID classroom and the program does not exist without them. Each researcher that has studied AVID has commented on the presence of these three elements within practitioners' classrooms (Mehan, et al., 1996; Freedman, 2000). My participants enacted at least one of these principles each day, demonstrating how much a part of the learning process they had become.

While the above principles are necessary for a classroom to be defined as an AVID classroom, they do not exist without the presence of other types of pedagogy used by my participants. A key finding in this study has been the importance of difference, idiosyncrasy, pedagogical preferences, and skills. As the data chapters will show, each participant's work is simultaneously like and unlike that of the other two participants.

Teachers do not follow a recipe for success, rather, they bring who they are as people into each encounter and teach in response to the needs of their

students. The result is teachers who work toward the mission of AVID: "… to increase schoolwide learning and performance…to ensure that all students, and most especially the least-served students in the middle capable of completing a college path…" (training manual, 2003, p. iii.). Each teacher is able to fulfill this mission while staying true to his or her own pedagogical style and maintaining a focus on the needs and abilities of his or her particular students. Perhaps one of the reasons that AVID has been so successful has been its unique ability to strike a balance between providing structure and allowing for freedom.

The individual approach with which each teacher is able to enact the AVID program will be further illustrated within the data chapters. Within these chapters, I look at common themes observed in all three teachers' practice. Some of these themes are mentioned within the AVID literature, but are not considered major, explicit themes of the program. The five themes I identified in each teacher's classroom were defined in the guiding themes section of Chapter One and include caring, high expectations, flexibility, student responsibility, and voluntary participation. These themes will be discussed in terms of how they fit into the goals of AVID and how each teacher implements them in ways that are unique to their practice and to their students.

In each data chapter I also identify and portray aspects of each teacher's practice that are unique—not AVID principles that he or she was taught—not

attitudes and practices common to all three participants, but ways of teaching and being in relation to students that are particular and specific to each participant.

CHAPTER FIVE

Kris Jones: A Natural Leader

Kris is a White, 27-year-old female. She is short in stature, standing approximately 5'1" tall with a medium build. Her brown hair is one length with highlights and falls halfway down her back. Her eyes are big and brown and her expressions are animated—joy is shown in full force as is disappointment and anger. She is typically professionally dressed: skirts, slacks, and trendy shoes. She wears jeans but only on deemed "casual Fridays." Her presence is obvious by her voice and stature at the front of the room. Although equal in size to her students, she has the aura of an experienced teacher. She stands comfortably at the front of the room and her voice level is loud. The students definitely know she is there when the bell rings and she adamantly states, "That was the bell, take your seats!" They immediately fall into line and look toward her. She is a natural in terms of commanding her classroom, a trait she explains:

> I basically knew I was supposed to be a teacher from the time I was in high school, I think. I fought it for years because I was pretty sure I was supposed to be an attorney. I taught for two years in South America and have been teaching ever since. (K. Jones, interview, March 3, 2003)

Her acceptance of the call to teach seems to fit her; she easily motivates and organizes her students despite the fact that her background is very different from the students she now chooses to teach.

Kris was born in Louisiana, the oldest of two girls. Her family moved to Texas when she was very young and so she considers herself a Texan. Her undergraduate work took place at a private Christian university a few hours from home. She is very proud of this school and often encourages her students to look into attending college there.

Kris began her teaching career in South America where she spent two years teaching English. Upon returning to America, she was asked to teach AVID in her job as a middle-school teacher in the district where she currently works. She jumped in enthusiastically, attending three AVID institutes, one to learn how to implement the program and two to refine her skills. Kris was specifically recruited to Regis because of her AVID experience and has a teaching style compatible to AVID goals and objectives. I know from speaking with the AVID coordinator that "… AVID has recruited teachers for [Regis], in a sense because the promise to teach an AVID class was an incentive to come [for Henry and Kris]" (S. Turner, personal communication, August 23, 2003). Kris has a Master's degree in curriculum and instruction with a focus on bilingual education. She has five years of total teaching experience, with three of those years as an AVID instructor.

Kris became a part of AVID when she was hired as an English teacher at a middle school:

> I was brought to the AVID program by pure serendipity. The English teacher who interviewed me from [name of school] liked me enough to ask me to attend the AVID conference before school ever even started. I went to San Diego and got to see my parents and learned all about the AVID program. It actually worked out really well, because when I started my new school I already had a wonderful group of teachers that I knew and had spent a large part of my summer with. K. Jones (e-mail correspondence, June, 11, 2003)

When she moved from middle school to high school, her desire was to remain with the AVID program. She, like other AVID teachers, is responsible for attending site team meetings and follow-up training at the district. Her initiation into the AVID program has been fast and intense in terms of being given a lot of responsibility early on:

> We had to come up with a team portfolio and I was responsible for that. You know, putting together AVID curriculum and things that we were doing, and they look to see how much AVID had infiltrated your campus. (K. Jones, interview, March 3, 2003)

In addition, she recently completed writing and presenting an AVID implementation seminar in the northern part of the state. She single-handedly

prepared the information and, with the aid of two of her colleagues, presented the information to a large group of teachers.

A component of her classroom philosophy is revealed in what she says about her teaching style:

> I'm a pretty strict teacher; I don't necessarily allow them to dictate the way the class runs and that sort of thing, but I look at what I see as their needs and I try to work it around that way. (K. Jones, interview, March 3, 2003)

Her philosophy follows AVID's advice to teachers, that they should "adopt principles to their local circumstances, not to copy an existing program" (Mehan, 1996, p. 210). Kris adapts the AVID curriculum to meet the specific needs of her students.

CLASSROOM FEATURES

At the front of Kris's classroom is an L-shaped bulletin board decorated with orange, green, purple, and red backdrops. A fiesta border lines the board tying all of the colors together. Stapled onto the board are examples of student writing and creative poems written by her English class. Following the eye to the right counter clockwise around the room, a black chalkboard and white dry erase board are seen. On top of this is a cutout of a butterfly, and a poster reading, "Be on time, Be prepared, Be involved, Be yourself." The dry erase board is used to write objectives and assignments for Kris's English and AVID classes. Looking

toward the wall opposite the door, there are two rectangular windows with posters containing literary pictures and sayings. The back wall is framed with the words, "Do you know?" Underneath is AVID student work showcasing their first research efforts, which were informative in nature and covered topics such as teen pregnancy, date rape, and drunk driving. Underneath this wall are five computers for student use—a trend I noticed in all of the classrooms: a plethora of computers with Internet access, contradicting research that concludes "access to educational technologies are unequally distributed among schools of differing racial or socioeconomic status" (Leigh, 1999, p. 17). This may be a general truth, but at Regis the students have computers in their classrooms as well as a well-equipped lab available for their use.

In the corner of this wall and the entry wall is Kris's desk. It is the quintessential picture of organized chaos. Kris has papers, both student work and administrative paperwork, strewn across her desk. To the observer it may appear messy, but Kris always knows where everything was located. To the right is her computer, an instrument she did not use during class time, but utilized during non-instructional times. On the front of her desk are a dozen or so books used for reference by both herself and her students. Behind her desk is a bookshelf full of reference materials and a file cabinet—a must for all teachers. The final wall next to the door is another dry erase board that has the bell schedule written on it. A

table underneath holds bins for each class period where students turned in work. Below the table Kris has a small refrigerator for her lunch and drinks.

Her room is brought to life by her literary posters, pictures on a bulletin board near her desk, and the large display of student work on the walls. The room is not too crowded nor too sparse. Students have room to move around and can quickly rearrange desks if the situation warrants it. It is somewhat crowded, but students and teacher know how to navigate the space well. There is enough space for extra people to roam in and out of the room, a common occurrence in the AVID program as the AVID coordinator and university personnel are frequent visitors.

HER STUDENTS

Kris's student population is diverse; there are 11 Hispanic students, 7 African American students, and 1 White student. They are easily recognizable as freshmen by the gangly limbs of the boys and burgeoning figures of the girls. The students are on the brink between adolescence and adulthood, acting silly like middle-school students one minute and serious young people the next. They dress in typical teenage attire: big baggy blue jeans and athletic gear shirts for the young men—Nike, Adidas, and sports team logos adorn their shirts. The young women wear hip-hugger, bell-bottom blue jeans, clingy T-shirts and flip flop shoes. Hairstyles are diverse: there are a few afros, lots of long, straight hair, and a few girls who seem to change their hairstyle daily—from ponytails to

sophisticated French twists. It is a kaleidoscope for the eyes; they are all at various stages of physical development and unique in their attempts to define themselves as young adults.

THEMES

Within Chapter One, five terms were introduced and discussed as themes that I observed within each teacher's practice. The following sections will portray how Kris embodies and enacts the themes of caring, high expectations, student responsibility, flexibility, and voluntary participation as a means to increase her students' access to honors courses and college.

Caring

Caring is a difficult element to define and observe, but I believe that Kris displayed several behaviors that demonstrated the love and care she has for her students. Primarily, she knows her students beyond the borders of her classroom. Her knowledge of their lives outside of school was amazing; she attempted to help them balance academics and extracurricular activities. During a writing day, as students worked on their assignment, Kris calls out in a loud voice, "Michelle, can I see you for a moment?" Michelle, an African American student, is tall and has the well-defined muscles characteristic of a young athlete. She wears a white T-shirt with an emblem in the middle, denim Capri pants, and tennis shoes

without socks. She looks up, startled out of her work, places her pen on the graffiti-engraved desk, and saunters slowly over to where Kris is sitting.

Kris smiles brightly at her, “Sit down sweetie, I want to ask you about something.” Michelle glances sideways at her with a small smile on her face, seeming unsure whether Kris has good or bad news for her. She cautiously lowers herself down into the desk next to Kris. Kris turns toward her to look her right in the eye. “ I see that you are in the band, and according to the director, quite good.” She pauses as a huge smile washes over Michelle’s face and she graciously accepts the compliment. “Well, you know, ” she sings, cocking her head to one side, making her stiff ponytails flip to one side. Kris laughs at her response and continues to look Michelle in the eye as she speaks, “I would like to figure out a way that you could continue to attend your AVID class and be in band because I do not want to lose you. Have the band director come to me and we will see what we can figure out.” Kris emphasizes the phrase “ I do not want to lose you” nodding her head as she speaks. Kris refers to the fact that the band meets at the same time as AVID each day. Michelle returns her gaze, smiling and says, “Okay, Miss.” Kris inquired further: “I tried to contact your dad about this, but his number is not listed on your contact card. In fact, there was a woman’s name and number listed, but you live with just your father, right?” Michelle responds, looking puzzled, “Yes, ma’am.” Kris replies, “Give me his number and I will call him tonight and get this worked out.”

Michelle writes down the number quickly for Kris, places the pencil on the desk and begins to rise from her seat. Kris turns her gaze from Michelle to me and her voice level rises a bit, “Unfortunately sometimes electives get in the way of AVID because it is an elective as well and kids have to make a choice between activities.” She turns to Michelle, “Thanks, sweetie.” Michelle moves away from the desk and dances back to her seat, causing a few students nearby to giggle.

With another student, Kris demonstrated her thorough knowledge of his personality during the AVID interviews process. AVID interviews occur each year in the spring semester as students reapply to AVID for the following school year. These interviews involve the student, the AVID teacher, and the AVID coordinator, Sara Turner. Both the AVID teacher and Sara ask questions of the student about past performance and future goals. In addition, they ask the student questions about improvement in areas where he or she has struggled in the past school year. These interviews are held, in part, to weed out those who have not met AVID standards and to allow room for the many students who are waiting to be admitted to AVID. It is a process whereby the AVID teacher and coordinator can get information from the students and then decide whether or not they remain in the program. It is a challenging setup for students as they are alone with two teachers and questioned for an extended period of time. Many students I observed appeared intimidated by this: Their personalities were significantly different in the hallway sitting at a desk and facing adults than they were within the classroom.

Most were uncomfortable and quiet, answering questions in one-word responses as much as possible.

The first student I observed being interviewed was Julio. Julio is a confident, fun, and friendly Hispanic boy. He wears jeans, athletic team shirts, the latest style in tennis shoes, and often has a hat on his head sporting a team logo. He is typically smiling and definitely a leader in the classroom. As he sauntered out into the hallway to begin his interview, his hands were in his pockets and his hat was turned backwards. His smile has disappeared today and he sighs and lowers himself into a desk, slouching down as low as he can. He looks at Kris, who has said nothing, but is smiling at him. “What, Miss?” he asks while looking at the wall behind her. Sara, the AVID coordinator, innocently jokes with him about the placement of his hat. He quickly thrusts his hands deeper into his pockets and looks away. After he answers more than a few questions with a lackadaisical, “I don’t know, Miss,” Kris interjects, “Could I please see the nice Julio who comes to my class everyday?” At this, he glared at Kris, slouched even further down into his seat and focused his gaze on the wall behind Kris.

Kris, knowing Julio well, wisely changed her approached to make him more comfortable. She began to gush over his accomplishments. “Julio is always present, on time, and gives 100%. I love having him in my class.” Kris smiles at him, bending her head down to look him in the eye. Julio slowly moves his gaze from the wall into her eyes. He still avoids eye contact with Sara, but is clearly

opening up to Kris. One of his hands comes out of his pocket and onto the desk as he rolls a small scrap of paper in between his forefinger and thumb as he speaks. The conversation progresses and he begins to make small seconds of eye contact with Sara and responds to her questions as well. Kris shared with us after he left that " Julio gets an attitude when he feels attacked or threatened." I record in my notes: "I suppose having three adults staring at you while you respond to questions they ask could be intimidating for any 15-year-old" (Field Notes, March 21, 2003). I was amazed at Kris's ability to know this student so well that she was able to make him feel comfortable in a situation that did not lend itself easily to comfort.

Kris expects the best from her students and cares enough to confront them when they fail to give their best effort. For example, there is Bianca, who is small for her age, dresses in hip-hugger jeans and short shirts that expose her mid-section, but often wears a large jacket over her clothes as if to give herself the option to hide her attempts to display her figure. She has recently cut her long black hair into a short wedge, shorter in the back than in the front, making her appear a bit older. I notice her glancing at Kris intermittently and looking down when Kris catches her eye. Once Kris gets class started, she approaches Bianca, bends down next to her desk and quietly asks, "Could I see you in the hallway for a moment?" Kris waits by the door as Bianca shuffles her papers and stacks them neatly, stands up slowly, glances at her friend across the room, and then walks to

the door with her eyes on the floor. They both exit the room and Kris closes the door quietly behind them.

I stay with the students who immediately locate cell phones, magazines, and other teen paraphernalia—anything but the work that they are supposed to be completing. As Bianca and Kris re-enter the room 10 minutes later, the wise students scurry to put their unrelated items away and bring out their assigned tasks. Kris seems oblivious to their actions and concerned with Bianca; her face is tight with tension and her lips are in a thin, tense line across her face. She comes to the front of the room and warns, “I certainly hope you were working on your writing assignment—I will be looking at your work before you leave today!” I watch Bianca, who suddenly looks like a little girl; her eyes are wet with tears, her mouth is turned down, and she sits slumped in her small desk at the back of the row. Kris glances over at her a few times as she helps students with their writing. Bianca spends the rest of the class period staring at a blank piece of paper, blinking her eyes rapidly as if to hold back tears.

Later, Kris reveals, “ I had to talk to Bianca because she has been skipping class and coming back high. She was very embarrassed and upset that I will now have to call her parents.” Kris received this information from another teacher, not an uncommon occurrence for an AVID teacher. Other teachers are aware of AVID expectations and will report misbehavior to the AVID instructor. Kris takes these standards seriously and expects her students to as well. As she tells them,

"There are at least 15 people beating down my door to get into AVID. You need to work to be in here." Most of the students care enough to change their behavior in order to remain in AVID.

Another characteristic of a caring AVID teacher is familiarity and involvement with the students' families. This is typical of AVID instructors as parents are an involved party in the program. I could tell Kris knew her students' families by comments I heard her make to them such as, " I can call your mom at work right now if I need to." She was not shy about calling home and seemed to know the parents of each of her students. I did not realize the depth of some of these relationships until a student was missing for an extended period of time. As we walked down the cold outdoor courtyard to the computer lab, Kris and I lagged behind the students. I inquired, "Where has Amy been?" Her face immediately dropped and a look of concern enveloped her and her pace slowed considerably:

> Her mom called me and told me that she ran away to be with her boyfriend. It just makes me sick; she has such potential. I really hope she comes back, but at this point there is nothing I can do. Her mother actually works here as a custodian so we talk all the time. I asked her to keep me posted. (K. Jones, personal communication, May, 2003)

Kris looks up at me after this, shaking her head and lips pursed, she lifts her brows as if to say, "What can I do?" and we continue through the double doors

and into the hallway. The student's family was comfortable enough with Kris to call and talk to her about this unfortunate event, an action that speaks highly of her relationship with that student and her family.

Kris appears to work with her students' parents as a partner in their school life, an attribute specifically recommended by AVID proponents: "Successful school-wide programs place high value on parental and community involvement" (*Shaping the American Dream*, 2003, p. 3). Kris adopted this mindset as demonstrated in her frequent calls home and in conferences with parents. AVID works to incorporate parent involvement and Kris has done a thorough job of facilitating this process by keeping her student's parents informed about academic matters.

Kris also demonstrates caring in her attention to her students' academic endeavors and behavior in school. This fact was revealed during the AVID interviews as Kris brought up academics and attendance in an effort to get students to improve if they wanted to remain in AVID. During one interview, she leaned forward, forcing the student to look her in the eyes, and said, "Why is it that you cannot seem to attend your algebra class regularly?" The student looked down at the battered desk at which she sat, "I don't know, Miss." Kris was firm in her response: "Well, you'd better figure it out of you want to stay in AVID." She continued looking into her eyes, waiting until she met her gaze, which took a significant amount of wait time. The student met her gaze, and with a small smile

on her face said, “Okay, Miss, I will go to class!” in a tone that was both serious and playful.

During another interview Kris pulled out a student’s notebook and flipped quickly through the pages. “Your AVID notebook is never in order. I need a real commitment from you to have it done correctly for the rest of the year or you will be out.” She slams the notebook shut as she finishes this sentence. Her gaze is intense, her eyes wide and her expression serious. The student, a small Hispanic boy wearing pants that are too short and a cartoon character on his shirt, looks and acts young for his age. He is polite to adults and bright, but does not seem to fit in with his peers. He looks up shyly as if he wants to say something, but looks back down. After a moment of silence he gets his courage, “I try miss, I really do, but it’s hard for me.” He lifts his head to look at her, biting his lip, trying not to cry. Kris is sympathetic, but firm—her tone of voice flat and serious. “It should not be hard at this point, Derek—we have been doing notebooks all year and every week yours comes in unorganized and [with] items missing.” He voice begins to whine, reminding me of my 5-year old when he gets into trouble, “But miss, it’s not that bad….” Kris interrupts quickly, “Yes it is, fix it and I want to see it right for the remainder of the year—okay?” She leans toward him, pressing him for an answer. Derek looks up, teary-eyed. “Okay.” He rises from the desk to go back into the classroom, glancing back at us before he enters the room. Kris turns to Sara and me. “I may have been a little hard on him, but this has been going on all year and

all I get is excuses!" Her voice has risen significantly and she shakes her head in frustration—I can empathize; that whiny, squeaky voice is hard to take. Derek is moving from a shy boy into an assertive young adult. His attempt to stand up for himself in this situation is scary for him as seen in his shaky voice and attempt to keep from crying.

Kris knew details of her students' actions in their other classes and would often confront them with this knowledge. She took the time during the AVID interview to confront a student, Tonya, about her progress in another class. Tonya is a large African American student who always comes to class with a smile. Kris begins, "Mr. Cisneros has come to me to discuss your behavior in his class; he says you are not turning in assignments. What is going on?" Kris's tone is not accusatory but casual. Tonya looks up innocently and meets Kris's gaze, with a small smile on her face, "What miss? I turn in most of my work." Kris pauses and smiles in reaction to that response, "Tonya, most is not good enough. Let's see that all of your assignments get turned in from now on, all right?" Tonya looks down toward the ground, "All right," she says quietly.

Within the interviews, Kris requires that each of these students verbalize their commitment to improve by beginning sentences with "I will…." Each student muttered these commitments in small voices, looking only at Kris and avoiding both Sara and me. After they reaffirmed their commitment to adhere to AVID standards, Kris would place her hand on their shoulder or their hand, a gesture

that seemed to say, “I care about you,” smile into their eyes and leave them with an encouraging word: “I know you can do this.” The students left the interview with smiles on their faces, either relief from being let out of that situation or happiness in being given a second chance. Kris shared with me, “Sometimes they have a hard time envisioning something as far away as graduation and I have to constantly bring it to mind.” She cares enough about her students to be familiar with their schedules and grades while helping them keep in mind the ultimate goal of AVID: completing requirements to get into a four year college.

The ability of Kris to know her students’ lives both in and out of school is amazing and purposeful:

> I really do care about what happens to them and I try to let them know that. I’m shocked at how well they take things from me and how much they put up with. I just try to model the things I want them to do. When I hurt someone, I try to apologize; when someone’s talking, I try to hear their opinions, and that sort of thing. (K. Jones, interview, April 9, 2003)

Kris has a vested interest in teaching her students appropriate school behavior, both academically and socially. Studies of AVID assert the importance of this function:

> It appears to us that AVID coordinators are engaged in an explicit socialization process in their classrooms that parallels the implicit

> socialization process that occurs in well-to-do families. (Mehan et al., 1996, p. 81)

AVID teachers must teach their students to navigate through the school system successfully. “It is my job to teach you how to approach a teacher. If you have a problem with a grade or disciplinary action, it is okay to voice that, but there is a right and wrong way to do it. One gets you results the other gets you in trouble,” Kris explained to her students who were watching closely and listening quietly as soldiers might listen to their commanding officer.

The discussion pertaining to how to approach a teacher with a concern was illustrated perfectly a few days later. As students pile out of the classroom in their usual noisy manner, Kris turns to retrieve her lunch form the mini-fridge she keeps under a table in the room. A student returns to the room and stands shyly in the doorway. The microwave signals the end of its cycle with a familiar beep-beep and as Kris turns to retrieve her lunch, she notices the student. Kris inquires, “Can I help you, Sandra?” Sandra slowly enters the room, her long hair is in ponytails that do not move as she crosses from the door to the center of the room. She darts her eyes left and right, but never makes direct eye contact with Kris. Kris places her lunch to the side, takes a seat in a desk, and pats the seat next to her, signaling to the student to sit down. The student sits and after a lengthy hesitation asks, “Ms. Jones, why did I get a B on my notebook? Everything is here.” Kris leans toward her with her arm draped over the chair where the student

sits. Kris flips through the notebook; the sound of turning pages is all that can be heard in the empty classroom. Every so often she stops turning the pages and says, “See, this item is not in the right place. Organization is important too, you know!” her tone is light and she smiles as she speaks. They both lean toward the desk, examining the notebook, sifting through each page as Sandra explains her work. Her voice is louder and more confident than when she first approached Kris. She says with increased self-confidence, “Oh—that page is over here….” The flip of pages becomes faster as she searches to show the item to her teacher.

In the end, the student comes up with the right pieces and Kris remarks, “ I am glad you came to me; let’s try and see that everything is in order each week so your grade will be correct from the beginning. I will change your grade to a B+.” The news is met with a bright smile, a polite “thank you,” and a victory sign made to her friend at the door. Sandra quickly retrieves her notebook and skips to the door noisily. Kris watches her leave, smiling and shaking her head, and then returns to the important business of eating lunch.

The next day, Kris uses this encounter as a springboard for discussion. “See guys, Sandra came and politely asked me to explain her grade to her and she was right and her grade was raised. Always ask; it can’t hurt. I will say though, that had things been in order in her notebook, I would have been able to find them and the grade would have been higher initially!” She casts a sideways glance at Sandra and they smile at one another. Kris believes in the idea that AVID should

help and not hinder students' academic lives. "I try not to make AVID an extra stress, like another class. It should help the kids, not interfere with other school work" (K. Jones, personal communication, April 11, 2003). Because Kris takes the time to teach students how to speak up for themselves in the proper manner, students are learning to have a voice in their academic lives.

Another example of Kris caring for her students is her help in launching a project that would help them meet the 100-hour service requirement in AVID. Realizing that they are freshmen with limited access to transportation, she devised an idea that would allow them to complete their service hours on campus. Kris, along with her students, developed and implemented a recycling program at Regis. This action took a lot of personal time; Kris had to talk to the principal and city officials outside of school hours. She admits,

> In actuality, the service hours get thrown by the wayside more often than not. I mean it seems the last thing a teacher can focus on and so I figured while they were freshmen and we weren't dealing with the college entrance and that sort of thing really yet, I would have them come up with a service project. (K. Jones, interview, March 3, 2003)

She also sacrificed some of her curriculum time during the fall semester so that the students could have time to organize and plan the project. Despite the demands on her time, it is a project she speaks about with great satisfaction:

> My students went and presented the idea to other classes because they realized that they couldn't pick up all the recycling and decided to divide it. They showed them the benefits of recycling and then showed them the part of the school they would be responsible for and what the schedule would look like, and we called it "recycling reconnaissance" when we first started out. They went and followed the janitors to see where the recycling was actually going, they interviewed the head janitor, [and] they corned [the principal] and asked him why Regis didn't have a recycling program. (K. Jones, interview, March 3, 2003)

When Kris speaks about this program, the pride is evident in her eyes and her voice. It is an idea that she developed and worked on, but she gives full credit to her students for making it so successful:

> It is important to them that Regis look better in the eyes of the community and one way to do it is make Regis look better, you know, physically better. For them to make that connection without me dictating that connection is kind of what it is all about. (K. Jones, interview, March 3, 2003)

A typical recycling day began with Kris announcing that it is time to empty the bins: "Please be sure to pick up Mr. Lewis's bin; he has been on my case all week." The students rise simultaneously, ready to get started, but Kris stops them. She retrieves a list from her desk and begins to call out names of pre-

assigned groups and areas. “Pat, Tonya, and Albert, you guys head to the new mall and get the bins in corridor 300. Don’t mess around in the hall.” The noise from side conversations and students moving backpacks had risen to a level that no one could hear. Kris raises her voice. “Guys, I need you to be quiet and listen!” The room immediately quiets down as the startled students look up from what they were doing. She pauses and says, “Thank you, now please listen up for your assigned areas.” She calls out names and areas and the students file out in small groups as their names are called. “I expect you all to meet me at the main bin in 20 minutes, max!” she calls out as they file out of the room. When they are all gone, the room grows unusually quiet and Kris and I grab our coats and head out into the winter air.

I observe my surroundings when we arrive and note—we are at the back of the school next to a huge garbage receptacle, which emanates the smell of sour refuse. These bins are located in an unobtrusive area next to a wing of the school. As Kris and I wait and engage in small talk, our teeth chatter and the air in front of our mouths fogs. Finally, students begin to show up in clusters, dragging their recycle bins on the ground behind them. The students work together to pick up the overflowing bins and place the recycling materials in the main receptacle. A few remark about the garbage nearby, “What is that smell? Yuck let’s get out of here!” After dumping their bins, the students scurry away quickly to escape the smell and the cold. Kris and I wait until the last group delivers their bins, then a

tall student reaches up to close the squeaky top door. Kris locks it and we all run back to the warmth of her classroom. We arrive to find students sitting in small groups, shivering from the cold and talking about their adventures in recycling.

The care and love with which Kris approaches her teaching also involves expecting the very best from her students each day. She truly wants to see them succeed and is cognizant that her role in their success is to hold high expectations for them.

High Expectations

High expectations for students are required for an AVID teacher. Teachers in the program are introduced to the idea that, "Success breeds success, and AVID's visible, data-driven success has helped foster a culture of academic excellence, high expectations, and going-to-college within schools" (Swanson, 2003, p. 1). Without an implicit belief in the students' ability to succeed, an AVID teacher will be ineffective in implementing the curriculum. Kris expects a great deal from her students and reveals this fact in the academic choices she makes. She never waters down requirements or results, but rather requires more from her students than most teachers. When students don't meet expectations, she is quick to share, "You guys frustrate me because I know you can do better. You are so much more capable than this." Her declaration that she believes in their ability to improve, along with her ideas for how to achieve at higher levels, demonstrates her high expectations for her students.

The high expectations Kris has for each of her students was particularly evident within the six-week-long career assignment. I was fortunate to be able to observe this assignment from beginning to end, allowing me to see the depth of Kris's expectations for her students. Kris persistently pushed her students to think beyond their own limitations. For example, one student talked about being a bartender after college to which Kris responded, "Why aspire to be a bartender after college? Do that during college to help pay for it and move on to something else. Set your goals high; you can do anything you want." As a result, the career unit was full of students conducting research on medicine, law, teaching, and engineering - professions that often require work beyond even the undergraduate level.

Kris's belief that her students can succeed at anything is revealed during our interview:

> I am going to let them know that AVID is a place where the goal is to go to a four-year college and get a degree. We're doing a career assignment the next six weeks and that's going to be the goal behind that; letting them see what they're capable of. (K. Jones, interview, April 7, 2003)

Our first visit to the library is eventful; students file through the silver metal turnstile that produces a loud click as each person enters the library and noisily find his or her seat. They laugh and slam their backpacks onto the tables and filter toward the area Kris has reserved for them. They remove chairs from

under desks and the clicking of the metal legs is heard throughout the library. They sit down noisily and lean over onto their backpacks, looking bored. A few stragglers find friends from other classes and gravitate toward them, speaking in whispers and keeping their eyes on the door. As they see Kris approaching, they scurry back to their seats and sit down just as she comes in. Kris arrives behind the class, her gait getting faster as the noise level rises. She looks flushed and unhappy and begins to speak in a voice that is not library appropriate:

> Guys, that is unacceptable—you know better than to come in here like that. We have limited time in here—use it wisely! Please take out your assignment sheet and some paper. You may use the resource room, the career books Mr. Grey has pulled for you or computers. Please focus; I expect a quality product from you, as usual. Get going!

Her voice is raised in anger, her brows are furrowed, her forehead is wrinkled, and her hands are on her hips as her head moves from side to side, emphasizing her frustration.

After this outburst, the students get quiet and begin to slowly extricate items from their backpacks. A few "Does anyone have a pen or piece of paper I can borrow?" are heard. Kris waits at the front of the room for them to get ready. Her forehead has ironed out some and she takes a few deep breaths in an attempt to calm down. Finally, the sound of the last backpack being slammed to the floor is heard and they look to Kris for instructions. "You have three full research days,

please use the time as you should. I will be sitting right here if you need anything." She points to a large rectangular table in the center of the library. The students scamper to the appropriate areas to begin work, much quieter than when they entered the library. She sits down next to me and begins to read through their notebooks. "Ahh, I love this notebook. Look at this Leslie, this is what an AVID notebook should look like. Thank you, Tonya!" She smiles at Tonya, who smiles back knowing that her notebook is in perfect form that week.

For her part, Kris is full of boundless energy. She flits across the room in response to her students' cries of "Ms. Jones, help…." She is tireless in her ability to keep them on task and uphold expectations for the assignment. Kris moves from the resource room over to the computers, her voice rising in frustration. "Use Google—Jon, type in your topic and see what it gives you. Please do not change topics at this point—it is too late!" She comes back over to me, her voice loud with frustration, but not loud enough for him to hear. "He does not have a clue. I am so frustrated with him; he wants to change topics now—we are two weeks into this. He always does this!" Again, her forehead wrinkled and her lips in a straight line, she shakes her head and moves to help a student who has been waiting patiently with her hand up.

During library research days, Kris is diligent about keeping her students focused and making sure everyone is working. "Guys, you have one day left and that's all, this is a major grade!" She talks with students individually, particularly

those who are not focused, and urges them along. “Albert, if I were you, I would get working; you only have one more day in here.” Her days in the library are spent answering questions, helping with computers, and keeping her students on task. Her tireless commitment to keeping them on task appeared to help students focus on their work or at least to look as if they were doing so. They knew Kris was paying attention and expected stellar work from them. On the last day in the library, she is particularly attentive, looking over students’ shoulders at their work and commenting, “That looks great, Lisa,” or “ Tom, it looks as if you may have to put in some extra time at the library on your own.” Her comments are made in a light tone, as she passes by the student, usually as she places her hand on their shoulder, smiling. One student commented, “Miss, you are always on us!” bobbing his head from side to side and laughing as he spoke. Kris smiled. “You bet I am!” They looked at each other for a moment, smiling, and Kris moved on to the next table to monitor the progress of those students.

About halfway into the project, her students lose a bit of their momentum. They begin to talk rather than write in the computer lab, and a few inform Kris that their work is at home, to which she replied impatiently, “Start over, it’s due Monday!” She is openly disappointed with her class on this day:

> These guys have not begun to run themselves as my English classes have and I found out today that half of these students are failing at least one class for the semester. I really think it is because they are not challenged

> enough; we only require that they enroll in one honors class. Sara and I are talking about requiring all honors courses for next year. (K. Jones, personal communication, May 5, 2003)

In examining this quote, I realize how deep her belief in their ability runs. Instead of attaching their academic failure to ability, she attributed it to a lack of challenge in the classroom. This powerful statement reveals the importance of high expectations in an AVID classroom. Without a teacher who believes in their ability to succeed in school, AVID students could be doomed to mediocrity and unable to achieve the set goals of the program. I understood her faith in her students more thoroughly after I observed their presentations.

On the first presentation day, I enter the room to find Kris at the front with her class tutor struggling with some electronic equipment. I approach, asking what I can do, and learn that her laptop computer is not functioning properly. I offer mine, but Kris briskly replies, “I do not want them touching your stuff.” Finally the equipment appears to respond and is ready to display the students’ PowerPoint presentations. The day of presentations is filled with nervous energy; students enter class louder than usual and ask each other, “Are you ready?” PowerPoint disks are pulled out of bags, note cards emerge, and students sit at their desks poised for their turn as the bell rings. A few students sit near me and I overhear, “Are you ready?” “No man, you?” “I think so—I just finished late last

night." The comments are typical of procrastinating freshmen; I smile remembering my own students doing the same thing.

As the bell rings, the stragglers enter and Kris immediately begins the class. "Okay guys, here we go! Take out Cornell notepaper for note-taking—these will be turned in for part of your final exam." Lots of groans resonate, but the sound of shuffling paper is heard as Cornell notepaper appears on desks. She quickly moves to the back of the room and easily places her small frame on top of a desk. The students are poised and quiet in anticipation of their name being called to present. The order has already been chosen and Kris calls out, "Maya, it's your turn—get us started out right!" The student nervously approaches the front of the room and begins her presentation on becoming a medical doctor.

Maya receives welcome smiles from classmates and her teacher. Maya is well liked by all the students and self-confident in her abilities, yet is understandably nervous as she prepares to present her work to her peers. She places the disc in the computer to load her PowerPoint presentation, getting her wide orange silk blouse caught in the power cords. She attempts to lean over and untangle herself, but her long black skirt prevents her from accomplishing this feat. Kris approaches the front, laughing, and helps her. Finally, she is able to begin and the students nod their heads as she speaks and look at her in silent encouragement. I hear pens scribbling furiously on paper as the students take notes on the speaker's information. Maya enhances her presentation with a

colorful PowerPoint slide on the wall behind her depicting the educational requirements to become a doctor. The slide is impressive; it has moving pictures within the frame to capture our attention. I am awed by her technological knowledge; the PowerPoint slides are lively and colorful.

As the presentation progresses, Kris's approval is shown by her smile and her comments, "Good job, Maya," and, "You have really done your research on this—is this what you want to do after college?" Her questions prod the student to delve deeper into her topic. "Yes, I want to be a doctor and I know I am smart enough to do it," the confident student answers. Some students mumble under their breaths, "Whatever…." The keen student hears the comment and responds, "You'll see, I'll be working on your kids someday." Kris supports this assertion, looking at the student proudly. "That's right! That would not surprise me." Her full smile and warm tone support her words, and she clearly believes that this student is capable of becoming a doctor if she so chooses. She nods her head a lot and encourages the student with "That was awesome—way to get us started," in an exuberant, buoyant tone.

Only a few students fail to meet the expectations Kris has for the presentations. At the end of consecutive amazing presentations, Kris excitedly called for her next presenter, a young man sitting to my immediate right. "Tony it's your turn—I can't wait!" Her voice level is loud and full of enthusiasm. After she calls his name, he continues to sit, hiding an uncomfortable smile behind his

hand and looking down toward the floor. “What’s wrong, Tony? Cat got your tongue?” Kris asks jokingly. “No, Miss…” he continues to hide his smile. “It’s your turn.” She prods him. “I know, miss, but I don’t want to go.” He speaks in a high-pitched tone and moves his head in a circular direction, making sure he never makes eye contact with her. She continues to cajole him. “Come on Tony, I know you have something good to show us.” Kris smiles and patiently waits for Tony to come to the front of the room and make his presentation. The silence turns uncomfortable as it becomes clear Tony has nothing to show after weeks of in class time to work. Kris’s demeanor changes quickly, the smile fades and her brow furrows. “May I remind you that the consequence of not having a presentation is a zero, a zero that could potentially cause you to fail for the six weeks. You guys should not be failing AVID!” Her voice level has escalated to a yell, she rises from her seat, crosses the room to her desk, and slams her grade book on her desk. She turns around and continues to glare at Tony, shaking her head in disbelief. Tony continues to look at the floor, a small smirk frozen across his mouth.

Every so often, Tony peeks out at Kris without raising his head. An African American student next to him breaks the silence. “Just go, man, something is better than nothing!” Several students nearby join in this plea, attempting to break the tension in the room. “Come on man, you know you have something.” Despite the attempt by Kris and his fellow classmates, Tony

continues to look down at his desk shaking his head repeatedly in refusal. Kris finally gives up and says angrily, “I think it is Tony’s business, not yours.” Her tone is full of disappointment and she glares at him at length. This exchange has clearly changed her mood; she walks rapidly from her desk to the front of the room, but is interrupted by the sound of the bell. The class practically runs out of the room that day, with Tony being the first to leave. Kris turns to me, the disappointment evident in her eyes and in the frown on her face. “I can’t believe Tony did not present anything—that just kills me!” She shakes her head and gathers their notes from the presentations. Her energetic mood is dampened by one student’s choice to fail.

My look at the career unit from beginning to end allowed me to see that Kris held high expectations for each student as suggested in the AVID program. She provided multiple opportunities for students to meet her expectations and if a student chose not to, she did not blame the internal characteristics of the student. Her expectations were consistent with all students; she believed in their innate ability to be successful in AVID.

Student Responsibility

High expectations and student responsibility were elements that created a tension in Kris’s practice. There was a discord present between Kris’s desire to see her students succeed and the necessity that she allow them to take responsibility for their own successes and failures. There were times, such as

during the career assignment, in which she worked tirelessly to keep her students on task due to her deep desire to see them succeed. Then there were other times when she had to watch as they failed so that they could learn to take responsibility for their own learning. The tension between these two desires was present throughout her practice.

On the first day of the spring semester, Kris shares data from the students' first-semester academic performance. A few salient pieces included the fact that in her AVID class, only 3% of the students were meeting AVID standards to remain in the program and that their average grade point was 2.99 on a 4.0 scale. She stands at the front of the room and questions the students. "What do you think of this data?" The wait is lengthy and no one replies. Most students look at their desks and at each other, and a few smile uncomfortably across the room at each other. Finally, she calls on individual students, asking, "Do you fit into this data?" One student good-naturedly calls out, "Man, we are stupid, Miss," a comment that is met with laughter by his classmates. Kris responds in a serious tone:

> Don't say that, Tony—you are not stupid, wejust need to evaluate why this happened and move on from here. You would not be here if you did not have the ability to do well. I know you guys are smarter than the data reveals. I think we will spend some time today reviewing the requirements for AVID. This will serve to remind you guys of what you should be doing as well as orient our new students to the program.

When it becomes obvious that a constructive conversation about the data is not going to ensue, Kris takes another tactic. “Okay—get out a piece of paper and answer the following questions.” She moves to the chalkboard as students noisily locate paper, tearing sheets from spirals, clicking open three-ring binders and removing paper. Kris writes quickly, the sound of chalk going across the board uncharacteristically loud—click click click—as her hand moves across the board. She turns around and reveals these questions: “Why am I in the AVID program? Where do I see myself in the Spring of 2006? (You should be seniors) What is it about AVID that you are most excited about this semester?” The rest of the class day is spent responding to these questions—the room is unusually quiet for a room of freshmen, the sound of pens scribbling across paper is all that can be heard.

As Kris walks around the room collecting papers at the end of the period, she firmly reminds them, “The reality of getting to college is that you have to plan for it—that planning starts now.” She looks up from collecting work and makes eye contact with individual students. Many students look to her for the first time that day, but before anything else is said the bell rings and the students hurry out of the classroom. The quiet demeanor they had in class changes as they enter the hallway, yelling to friends and exchanging student banter.

Kris realizes the effect of sharing data with her students:

> I'm starting to see their becoming more cognizant. Now that semester averages have come out, the data means more because it's a credit, not just an average.… The purpose of sharing the data is to let them see their grades and know that college is not a reality if the poor grades continue. I think it's going better now, they expect it more now…. (K. Jones, interview, March 3, 2003)

Kris realized that sharing data was salient at this point because students had completed a full semester of high school. These averages have real consequences and the students know it. They can learn through their placement within the data that they are responsible for their position and are responsible for changing it if needed. It is a tangible method to allow them to see for themselves where they are on the road to attending college.

Kris recognizes the specific needs of freshmen and realizes that a new school and a new program have the potential to overwhelm them. She works to be a source of support to assist her students in their new, rigorous coursework (Mehan et al., 1996). However, by mid-year, she expects them to be performing at a higher level than the statistical data she keeps on them show. The data reveal that her class is the lowest performing in terms of grades when compared to the other AVID classes at Regis. When sharing statistical data with them, she never resorts to saying that they are incapable of doing well in honors classes, but

instead states out loud, " I am so disappointed. I know you can do better than this." She shares with me privately,

> I don't want them to be upset because they upset me, I want them to be upset because they can't get into the colleges they want to go with those sorts of grades. That's the purpose of sharing the data and I think it's going to get better now. (K. Jones, interview, March 3, 2003)

Kris is sure to keep in mind the ultimate goal of AVID and for these kids, that is to get admitted to a four-year university.

Accompanying the presentation of data was a discussion of their responsibility for these outcomes. If they choose not to attend class or not to turn in work, than they will fail. She reminds them, "The responsibility is on you to learn in class." By the same token, she praises them for their successes as well. "Look how many of you have at least three A's and how many of you were just points away from that, it's awesome!" Her students smile sheepishly in their seats in response to her praise, clearly thrilled at being recognized for their achievements. Kris does not credit herself or AVID for students' success, but is consistent in giving them the credit for both success and failure. They spend some time discussing organizational requirements and grade requirements for continued participation in AVID. Kris defers to Henry's seniors to further motivate her kids. "Go and visit Mr. Miller's board—he is displaying names of students who have been accepted to college. Most of them have more than one acceptance letter."

Kris's instruction on how to take Cornell notes, a note-taking strategy specific to AVID, stressed their responsibility to glean information from their classes. As they review the method of note-taking, she clicks on the overhead projector and uncaps a red pen. "What if Mr. Smith says something you do not understand? How can you write about it?" Students eagerly raise their hands. Others call out, interrupting one another. I hear "I don't know" and "who cares" among some more serious responses. Kris stops them - raising her hands above her head and lowering her downward facing palms - signaling for them to lower the noise level. "Okay, one at time please, so I can hear you."

A large Hispanic boy in the right corner patiently raises his hand. Kris points her overhead pen at him, letting him know it is his turn to speak. He emphatically states, "Miss, we do nothing in Mr. Phillips's class!" Kris sits down on a stool, smiles knowingly, and begins to write: "Okay - we can deal with that also. You can record on the left side of your paper questions you have about what he doesn't say." She proceeds to draw a thick, red line down the middle of the projector and scribbles questions on the left side, speaking as she writes. "Even if you feel like his lecture is not saying anything, you still know the topic, such as integers, fractions, whatever - you can make your questions and look up the answers on your own or bring them to tutorials." She proceeds to provide several examples of how to turn what is supposedly "nothing" into topics and questions for further analysis.

She looks up from writing, clicks off the overhead, places the top on her pen and looks at them seriously. “You must learn to adapt to different teaching styles and Cornell notes is one way of doing this - any lecture or reading assignment can be summarized and questioned. The responsibility is on you to learn in a class.” The students are uncharacteristically quiet, many lay their heads on backpacks, peeking up at her shyly.

As the year progressed, Kris began to move her students closer to independent learning. She monitored their in-class work less and allowed them to manage their own work time. This is not to say that she did not answer questions and help; however, she did not pester them to stay on task as she did in the career assignment. Again, this change demonstrated the tension between having high expectations, yet realizing that students have to succeed or fail on their own in order to learn. The ability of her students to learn to work independently is paramount to their academic success and an explicit goal of AVID. Most of the students were ready for this responsibility and used their working time wisely—much more so in January when my observations began. When I asked Kris about their self-sufficiency, she had this to say:

> I think we’ll all grow up and I think that they’re just going to have to love me and hate me at the same time and I don’t think to be a good teacher that that means every child adores you from the get-go. Like, I think they

just need to realize that I challenge them and that I'm not backing down. (K. Jones, interview, April 7, 2003)

I consistently observed her inner struggle to have her students do well while knowing that she must provide the freedom for them to do that on their own. Her ability to engage in social scaffolding—lend strong support in the beginning and then slowly lessen those supports—moves her students toward self-sufficiency and being prepared for the independent learning required in college (Mehan et al., 1996; Gay, 2000). Her students are not yet at the level of the senior class, but fortunately, Kris and her students are only beginning their journey toward that goal.

Student responsibility is a process, a skill that freshmen are introduced to that should be perfected by the time they are seniors. It is necessary so that they will complete their college applications and leave high school ready to engage in the independent learning required in college.

Flexibility

Kris was flexible in terms of adapting instructional time and strategies, depending on what her students needed. A particularly remarkable example of her flexibility occurred the day she let the seniors come and talk to her freshmen. The seniors enter the room and shyly stood at the front of the room. I see a few of the freshmen say hello to them, perhaps knowing then from school or some other community context. Kris begins, "Thanks for coming, you guys. Mr. Miller's

seniors are here to talk about AVID and how it has helped them in high school. Each of these people standing in front of you has at least three letters of acceptance from colleges all over the state." The eyes of the freshmen enlarge in admiration; they are sitting quietly in their seats, appearing ready to listen. A small African American girl begins, "Well, I've been accepted to five schools: Baylor, Texas A&M, Southwest Texas, PrairieView, and Texas Tech, and I am waiting to hear about financial aid. But basically, just stick with it man. I know it's hard, but it will be worth it in the end."

Another girl chimes in, "Yea, ya'll just do what your teacher says and you'll be alright. Me, I'm going to South State University down the road—me and my girl over there." She points to a classmate standing a few feet from her. "We're going to be roomies." They give each other a high five, smiling and laughing. An African American male chimes in. "Don't drop out of AVID. I tried that, man, and I was on my own for a year and it was hard." He shakes his head and covers his mouth with his hand as he looks across the room laughing.

Kris poses an interesting question: "What role does your teacher play in your success?" A talkative senior replies, "Ms. Turner is like our mama, staying on our backs and making sure we don't mess up. Mr. Miller is like our uncle; they look out for us." Kris smiles brightly. "See guys, you will love me like that someday!" Her students laugh along with her. Kris suggests, "If you guys can stay awhile, why don't we break up into small groups and allow the students to talk to

you that way." They all nod their heads in agreement and begin to move the desks into circles encompassing four to five participants. Each senior facilitates his or her own group and the conversations are loud and ongoing. Kris stands next to me and says, "I did not plan for this to take the entire period, but I think it is really beneficial, there is so much they can learn from the seniors."

One assignment the students must complete during the freshmen year is a life goals essay. This is part of the AVID curriculum and a task that Kris has to have them do, yet she adapts the assignment to make it more challenging and interesting for her students. When Kris announces this assignment, her students groan loudly. "Miss, we do this every year!" Kris responds patiently, "I know, but Dr. Grant at the district requires it; however, I have adapted it so you don't feel like you are doing the same old thing." She proceeds to hand out a piece of paper outlining the assignment. Her change has been to make the writing reflect students' goals within their different roles. "For example, you may discuss professional goals, academic goals, and extracurricular goals in terms of what they are or how they have changed over the years." Kris sighs and continues, "We don't have a choice on this one, guys, let's make the best of it. This could actually benefit you, you know." She smiles at them and begins to help individual students begin their writing.

In this example, Kris once again balances AVID expectations with the needs of her students. She knew that they would resist the assignment and so

adapted it to meet their interests. She was flexible in terms of what the final product would look like, but not in the fact that they had to complete it. Once again, she had high expectations for their learning and changed an assignment to insure her students' success; yet, she upheld her commitment to student responsibility by letting them know this was not an assignment they could opt not to complete. Within AVID, there are certain assignments and requirements that must be met despite what the teacher or student wants. Part of the teacher's job is to make those tasks as pleasant as possible and to help her students succeed in their efforts.

Voluntary Participation

Kris had a way of weaving the voluntary nature of participation in the AVID program into the classroom on a regular basis. If a student chose not to do an assignment or had numerous absences, she was not shy about saying, "It's your choice to be here." Her high expectations merge with the idea of kids wanting to be there. She feels that "they choose to be here, so they must meet standards" (K. Jones, interview, March 3, 2003). Because of this belief, she never backed down or allowed her students to slack off in their work. Her reminders that "there are at least 15 students beating down my door to be in your place, AVID is a privilege, and there are others are waiting to be in the program should someone drop out" helped to keep the students motivated to meet AVID standards.

Although her comments reiterated her commitment to the voluntary nature of participation, I could not help but feel there may have been a more productive way to communicate her desires. It was as if she were holding a carrot over their heads saying, “this could be taken away at any moment.” It felt like a threat and I wondered if the kids were cognizant of this as well. I wondered why Kris, a caring and loving teacher, would speak to her students in a manner that could be construed as dismissive and intimidating. Her language had the potential to make the students feel as if they did not matter and could easily be replaced.

The voluntary nature of the program was particularly evident during the aforementioned re-interview process. During this interview, each student is called out into the hallway to answer questions from both Kris and Sara, the AVID coordinator. Most students saunter into the hallway looking uncomfortable, take the seat directly in front of the two teachers, and look down at the desk. Kris begins the interview. “How do you think you are doing in AVID so far?” The majority of students look up and quietly say, “Okay.” At this general response, Kris begins to ask questions specific to the student. “What about your math grade?” or, “Talk about your attendance in history.” She generated questions about all of the student’s academic classes as well as their performance in AVID. “Is your notebook always in order?” and “Do you participate in tutorials?” are some of the more frequent inquiries. The students then have to orally devise a plan to meet those standards during the last six weeks of school. Kris reiterated

the fact that "AVID is your choice, no one is going to make you stay. You have to do what it takes to remain in the program." Kris encourages them to stay, but knows that it is their choice, and knows only they can decide if they are willing to do what it takes to make AVID successful for them. Her focus on student responsibility during the interview process reiterates that facet of AVID and reminds the students of the individual determination contained within the acronym "AVID."

Voluntary participation was a theme I observed within each AVID classroom, and it is also one of the elements discussed in AVID training. The AVID program knows that AVID cannot be forced on anyone (Mehan et al., 1996). Teachers and students must want to be in AVID in order to engage in the hard work necessary to see the program work.

While Kris enacted the common themes I observed in all three AVID classrooms, she also had her own style and made pedagogical choices that differentiated her from the other AVID teachers. The next section will describe the ways in which her practices were unique to Kris and to her students and further depict how this particular AVID classroom functioned and flourished on a daily basis.

KRIS'S PEDAGOGY

In portraying Kris's teaching style, several additional themes emerged for discussion in terms of what type of pedagogy may be used in an AVID classroom.

By demonstrating commitment to AVID, instituting firm guidelines, and establishing rapport with her students, Kris's practice works to positively affect her students' access to honors classes and college enrollment. Although these themes do not portray all that Kris does in the classroom, they provide a window to her practice and an opportunity to see the AVID program in action.

Commitment

An implicit goal within the AVID program is to have a teacher committed to staying with a group of students for four years. This is not specifically mentioned in the literature on AVID; however, it is discussed within training sessions and the teachers I worked with at Regis knew it was an expectation. Kris discussed with me at length her belief in this commitment:

> I intend to stay with this class all four years and then attend graduate school. I will take my GRE exam as they take their SAT exams and we will apply to schools together. We will take the journey together, but I feel it is important to stay with them all four years. (K. Jones, personal communication, January 2, 2003)

She verbalized this commitment to her kids regularly. In the computer lab, as students are furiously typing into Google, a website search engine, looking for college information, Kris wanders around peeking over their shoulders, "Hey Stanford, good choice, Roxanne. That's where I want to be!" reminding them of her goal to return to school for her Ph.D. Today she sits with the students and

begins to look at requirements for entrance into Stanford's doctoral program. "Oh my gosh, that is a high minimum score needed for the GRE—I am so nervous." "When are you going, Miss?" a student casually asks from across the room. The students' ears perk up at this question, perhaps interested to see if she will be around for awhile. "Oh—don't worry, I will be around to harass you for your high-school career. I intend to apply to schools with you and hopefully we will go off together." The students smile, almost in relief, and return to work. The consistency of having one teacher for all four years is said to benefit both teacher and students in the AVID program, allowing them to fully know and trust one another (*Shaping the American Dream,* 2003). The end result should be a group of students who know there is someone at school they can turn to in times of joy and crisis—an advocate for them.

Kris is also committed to seeing her students succeed in the classroom, even if that means she has to sacrifice some personal time to see that happen. She mentioned that "AVID takes a lot of extra time from a teacher: You have to know each student, deal with more paperwork, and stay on them about their grades." She declined certain activities because they may take her out of the classroom or take time away from her teaching. An example is her goal to become a national-board-certified teacher. National Board Certification is one of the highest honors a teacher can attain, but it requires

> … intense self-reflection and analysis of one's own practice …teachers prepare their portfolios by videotaping their teaching, gathering student products and other teacher artifacts, and providing detailed analyses of their practice. They are designed to capture teaching in real-time, real-life settings, thus allowing trained assessors to evaluate how teachers translate theory into practice. (Standards and National Board Certification, 2003, p. 1)

The certification process entails a significant time outside of the classroom and has the potential to take attention away from teaching, something Kris ultimately decided would not be the best situation for her students. Her decision was solidified when an event, described later in this work, occurred at Regis that required extra time from her. "I chose not to do National Board Certification because of what happened; because I feel like there's too much to be done here for me to do something that's going to take me away" (K. Jones, interview, April 9, 2003). Her dedication to her students is admirable. Kris serves as their mentor and coach, as seen in some of the intense conversations she shares with her students.

On a recycling Friday, Julio sits with his head down on his desk. His jeans are baggier than usual today; he keeps his New Orleans Saints jacket on and looks bleary-eyed, as if he has had no sleep. Kris inquires, concerned, "Julio, what is wrong today? You don't seem yourself?" The student lifts his head up from his

desk. “Aww, Miss, I broke up with my girlfriend last night—it hurts!” Rather than dismiss this as teen drama, she excuses him from recycling duty that day and talks with him. “I feel ya’—I am going through a breakup myself. It sucks, doesn’t it?” “Yea Miss, I was up all night.” Tony looks tired and sad, with a look of a young man experiencing his first real heartache. Kris is sympathetic and human, committed to hearing his woes and responding to them appropriately. She places her hand on his shoulder, squeezes it and moves away recognizing his need for some space.

In addition to her concern with their personal lives, she is also involved in their academic personas. During the chaos of a typical day in the freshmen AVID class, students are mingling around desks, chatting about freshmen things. “He broke up with her, no way!” The bell rings just as a student approaches Kris with a problem. Rather than turn her away because she needs to begin class, she lets the chaos continue while she sits down to meet the need of the student. “Ms. Jones, my schedule is all messed up, could you look at it?” “Sure Julia…” Kris looks at the schedule, crinkles her brow and asks, “Why don’t you have a history class?” “I don’t know, Miss” “Have you tried to get this fixed?” “Yes, Miss, I went to the counselor a couple of times, but the line was too long.” Kris moves to her desk, scribbles something on paper, hands it to the student and says,

> Go and fix this now—sit there until the counselor sees you and if you need a pass to get into your next class, come and see me. You have to fix this if you want to graduate on the correct plan to get into college.

The student takes the pass, gathers her things and heads to the office. Kris shakes her head and says to me, "We are having some major scheduling problems this year!" As the student scampers out of the room, Kris turns her attention to her class. "Okay guys, the bell rang some time ago. I needed to talk to Julia real quick, let's get going…." Kris is well aware of the importance of helping her students navigate their way through high school:

> Once they start seeing the academic benefits… they're not really going to see that as freshmen because their classes aren't hard enough. Once they realize how hard the PSAT and SAT are going to be for them, then I think that's when it become less of an issue. I think they will understand my role a little more at that point. (K. Jones, interview, April 9, 2003)

Teacher commitment is more implicit than explicit; I am not sure the students are aware of the behind-the-scenes work and sacrifices Kris makes to be a committed teacher. However, what they are cognizant of is her availability to discuss both personal and educational concerns and her attention to their lives. The commitment Kris shows to her students also manifests itself in the stringent demeanor she sometimes adopts to motivate her students.

FIRM GUIDELINES

Kris had an ability to be firm with her students, using a tone and expression that lets them know she means business. Her tone and voice level change in such a way that her students stop what they are doing and look to her. One method by which Kris presented her firm guidelines was in the form of contracts submitted to the students. These contracts are part of the AVID program and not something Kris instituted, but the way she presented them and enforced the requirements demonstrated her firm guidelines. These contracts reiterated AVID requirements: grade average, attendance rates, and behavior expectations. As she passes the contracts out, she verbally reminds them of their responsibilities for the remainder of the year: “Stay off probation, pass all of your classes. This is important, for one, to be able to go on field trips and, two, to remain in AVID next year.” She states this matter-of-factly as she moves down each aisle handing a sheet of paper to each student. Student response is muted; there are no groans of complaint, just acceptance as seen when they take the contracts and sign them without a word. “Those of you who do no meet the contract requirements will be placed on probation and required to attend after-school tutorial hours until the requirements are met.” Her tone and facial expression are serious, expressing the important nature of meeting standards to stay in the program.

Another incident that reveals her firm guidelines involved a theft in her room. Kris was out sick one day and in her place was a substitute. Because I have

been in her classroom for almost three months at this point, many of the students were more comfortable asking me questions versus the unknown substitute. One student approached me and asked, “Miss, can I have a mouse ball for the computer?” My reply was quick, “Sure, but where are they?” The student opened up the right desk drawer and picked up a Ziploc bag containing three mouse balls. I handed one to him and he said “thanks” and proceeded to work on his paper. Halfway into class, he was called to the office and did not return to the room.

The next day, I received an e-mail from Kris asking where the equipment was located. I returned to her class on Wednesday and told her I had given it to Mike. “They are not to be given mouse balls when I am gone!” she snapped and walked quickly away from me and into the room. She immediately went on a tirade to her students,

> You guys need to respect the rules when I am out. This area over here [she points toward her desk] is my stuff—my stuff! I have never had to lock things up or worry about you guys because I trust you. Maybe I need to re-think that. I need to be able to know when I am out that you guys are not going to go through my desk and take things that don’t belong to you!”

Her voice is shrill and loud, her brows are furrowed, and her hands used for gesturing. The whole confrontation is a bit confusing as only Mike and I have any inkling as to why she is so upset. Most of the students sit looking at her in

confusion. One calls out, “Miss, we don’t even know what you are talking about,” a comment that goes unanswered by Kris.

This confrontation disturbs me as a researcher because it seems laden with assumptions about her kids and their behavior. Are her accusations merely a retreat into relying on stereotypes about the conduct of students of color? Why does she assume that the mouse ball was stolen and not lost? I also wonder how the students are feeling about the boundaries she has made explicit – the idea that her desk and her personal belongings are not to be touched. The typical familial atmosphere in this classroom is disturbed by her words and her actions.

Kris’s firmness is also revealed in her words and the intonation with which she speaks. As students were about to begin their presentations, there was a lot of extraneous talking by the audience, typical behavior for a classroom of freshmen. However, Kris was annoyed by it. “Do not talk!” she speaks loudly and firmly. As the first presenter approaches the front of the room and begins to speak, another student is smacking his gum as he listens. Kris says impatiently, “Do not crack your gum!” The student presenting continues, “The college I chose is….” A few students continue side conversations and Kris is clearly annoyed by their behavior. “We are having a presentation, man, ya’ll” she heaves a huge sigh and looks at them in disappointment. Her eyes are wide and she stares at them for a few minutes, Finally, she looks to the speaker. “Please continue, Emma, I am

sorry for the rude behavior of your classmates." The student begins again and is able to get through the presentation with no more interruptions.

The conclusion of the college presentations is met with Kris expressing her disappointment to her students:

> Overall I am pretty disappointed in your efforts. You guys did better presentations last fall; I expected more. Remember, these presentations were supposed to be persuasive and convince your classmates to attend your college. This should be great research for you to return to in your junior year when you begin to narrow down your college choices. I know I seem to have a perpetual frown and I am sorry, but many of you will not be happy with your grades on this.

She looks at the class, clearly unhappy, and her students respond with bland expressions and lots of looking down toward the floor. Both her words and her firm tone illustrate the frustration she feels when her students fail to give their best effort.

RAPPORT

The ability of Kris to be firm with her students translated into a rapport within the classroom in which she was clearly in charge, students were familiar with expectations and how to meet them, and there existed mutual respect between teacher and student. It was her ability to establish firm guidelines that I believe helped build the strong sense of family within her classroom. Just as

children need guidelines and discipline from their parents, Kris's students needed these elements from her to establish the bond I witnessed between teacher and students. Rapport-building in a classroom evolves throughout the year, and when I arrived in January a lot of the groundwork had already been laid; however, there were many examples of its presence during my tenure. As early as my first day in the classroom, I witnessed the special relationship Kris shares with her students.

During a lesson, Kris has to stand on a stool to reach the overhead projector and her students tease her. "Miss, are you standing on a stool? That is so sad!" Kris laughs with the class and comments, "No making fun of my height, okay?" Her smile and voice intonation are in line with a person who is comfortable in her environment. On another occasion, Kris receives flowers from her boyfriend and cajoles her students, "Did you guys see my flowers? Somebody loves me!" A boy in the front row responds, "Ooh, Miss, who would love you?" She responds, "Everybody loves me!" This exchange is filled with laughs shared between Kris and her students. Kris is clearly comfortable with her students, laughing and smiling with them regularly. Her ability to match the intonations and fluctuations of her students' speech demonstrates her level of comfort with them.

I witnessed repeated instances in which Kris would joke with her students and when the banter between teacher and student was akin to parents and children or even siblings. As she explained a life goals assignment to her students, she jokingly asked, "Okay, so what do you need to do if one of your goals is not to

have a child until after college?" The students giggle as typical freshmen do when this subject is broached. A few offer "don't have sex" and "use birth control" as reasonable suggestions. Kris smiles and replies, "The point is to have a plan, make it a goal if you think this is going to be hard for you. Things don't just happen, you have to plan for them." Her students took this example in stride and it demonstrated to me the caliber of their relationship; not all teachers could broach the subject of sex in such an easy manner, encompassing laughter from both teacher and student. The discussion did not feel like a lecture, but like people getting together to problem-solve and offer solutions to obstacles that could impede success.

Another instance in which I witnessed the strong rapport between teacher and student was during a discussion of the war in Iraq. The discussion was couched in terms of debating whether a student athlete had the right to turn her back on the United States flag at a sporting event. Kris had given the students an article the day before to read and decide whether they agreed or disagreed with the content of the article. They then had to argue for the affirmative or negative, much like a debate.

Students quickly congregate on the affirmative or negative side of the room, depending upon which they have chosen. A little over half of the students are on the affirmative side, believing that the student athlete was right to turn her back on the flag. An African American girl in the back corner calls out, "She

should be allowed to show her opinion just like anyone else in this country." Kris responds to the student, "But was it disrespectful—should she be punished?" Most of the students shake their heads no, with one adamantly stating, "Why should she, she was standing firm in her beliefs!"

The discussion quickly turns to the war in Iraq and whether or not America should be fighting in this country. Because of the heated nature of the topic, students are eager to participate in talk of war. Classmates share comments such as "we have no business fighting over there," "I hate Bush," and "no one has our backs." A girl and boy on opposite sides of the room dominate the discussion in the beginning. The girl is adamantly against the war and this boy defended it saying, "My brother is over there; are you saying I should not support him?" His face is wrought with emotion and his voice escalates to a yell. The girl responds, "Of course we support our troops—they can't help but be there. My cousin is there also." The discussion becomes a hotbed for attacks on the president. All but one student sit on thenegative side at this point; still, the lone student is allowed to state his opinion. "We have to support our troops. How do you think it makes them feel to have us over here complaining while they are fighting for our freedom!" The other students listen to him and though they respond passionately, never resort to name-calling or derogatory comments. Most make comments to the effect of "we do support our troops, just not the war." This was a discussion

that I feel could only take place within a safe environment where a strong relationship existed between teacher and students and amongst students.

For her part, Kris was amazing in her ability not to express her opinion; she never gave a clue as to which side she was on. I watched her carefully as I had an idea from our conversations as to where she stood on the issue of the war in Iraq, but she sat atop a desk smiling as she listened. She questioned the students to think about what they said: “Are you sure that is a neutral statement?” “Does what you just said agree or disagree with the prior statement?” She also used questioning to get them to explain their opinions more thoroughly and accurately, they were required to provide evidence for their thoughts and not just say “because.”

After the discussion, Kris added some additional comments for thought: “Many times war effects us differently here than in other countries because many wars—Vietnam, the Gulf War and this one—are not fought on our soil. I want you to read more articles on the topic of war and be ready to discuss next week….” The bell rang, interrupting her comments, and the students gathered their things to leave, many of them still talking about the war in Iraq. I commented to Kris about her neutrality to which she replied, “Do you think so? I am so glad because I try to not show my opinion one way or another. I don’t want them to be swayed by what I think.” I admitted to my inability to not shake my

head at certain points during the debate and make known by my body language what I was thinking. Kris laughed and replied, “It takes a lot of practice!”

FINAL THOUGHTS

At the end of my study, I recall my first-day impressions and ideas about Kris and her class. I recall her question to them: “Why are you in the AVID program?” I remember their responses: “AVID will help me get into college and I want to go to college.” A pretty African American girl in the middle of the circle replied, “To be with my friends.” The students slowly began to chime in, with the majority of students admitting they are in the AVID program to gain access to information that will help get them to college. Kris told them that day, “I chose AVID because I want to teach you guys and help you achieve your goal of getting to college. I am excited about the spring semester because I know all of you can do better than this. I know it—we will work together to improve this semester.” I was struck at that time by Kris’s ability to talk to her students as the young adults that they are becoming. She did not berate them for past performance, but rather built them up by demonstrating her belief in them.

By May, there were significant improvements: her AVID class no longer sat at the bottom of the statistical pack. Their desire to “get to college” appeared more real as they completed their freshmen year with improved grades and a grasp on how to fulfill the requirements of AVID. These results did not come easily, as Kris stated, “ If someone told me at the beginning of the year that I

would go through all of this and survive it, I would have thought they were crazy!" Kris has navigated her students through the crucial freshman year and will return next year to continue her work toward teaching them the necessary skills to succeed in honors courses and to gain access to a four-year university.

This chapter provided examples of five themes that I observed in all three AVID classrooms—caring, high expectations, student responsibility, flexibility, and voluntary participation—that characterized one AVID classroom at Regis High School. In addition, the elements of commitment, firm guidelines, and rapport-building are discussed as being unique to Kris's practice and differentiating her from other AVID instructors. By bringing these concepts to life in her teaching practices, Kris provides a model for others to follow and gives life to the idea that teaching is more than providing curriculum to students. The AVID program in Kris's classroom encompasses some of the same themes as in her colleagues' classrooms, but manifests itself in a way unique to Kris and to the relationship she has built with her class of freshman students.

CHAPTER SIX

Henry Miller: The Veteran

Henry stands at the front of the room, dressed in jeans and a long-sleeved shirt; the tattoo on his arm peeks out of his rolled-up sleeve. He has light brown hair, a goatee, and looks quite a bit younger than his 28 years. His dress is appropriate for his position, neither too dressy nor an attempt to look like his students. Henry goes against Foster's assertion that White secondary male teachers are the worst dressed in the profession (Foster, 1986). He has the look of one who cares about the impression he makes on his kids and chooses to respect himself and the profession by dressing appropriately. He is typically smiling and possesses a calm persona. Over the course of my work with him, I never witnessed a time when he yelled or frowned at anyone. When he speaks, it is necessary to be quiet as he is extremely soft-spoken and does not raise his voice often. In the past two years, he has lost close to forty pounds, a fact his students comment on when they see pictures of him when he first began teaching them. I heard more than a few " Mr. Miller, you were fat!" exclamations. He smiles good-naturedly at these comments. He now spends a lot of time running, cycling, practicing yoga, and recently, participating in triathlons.

Henry entered the teaching profession later in life after many interesting life experiences. He is a preacher's son from a small Texas town who left home at 16 to live in the mountains of Colorado. He attended five colleges before settling down and graduating, working at a bar while attending classes:

> To make extra money I started working at Mickey's in the evenings, doing security and had those jobs for a long time until I justwent full time at Mickey's and worked there for three years and in that process began teaching which got me interested in education, which took me back to Texas. I never felt when I was at Mickey's… I never felt like I was settled and I never felt like… I did not like the bar scene much anyway and I kind of slowly started sobering up to the idea that it didn't make sense to be in a bar studying when I was trying to get my life together and actually make a marriage work. (H. Miller, interview, February 2, 2003)

In the process of "getting his life together" he felt a strong pull toward teaching, originating, he feels, from both his roots as a preacher's son and his mother's encouragement:

> Well, my father, my grandfather, my great-grandfather were all preachers, in North Texas, New Mexico—all share cropping, church-house preachers. My dad is also a professor and my mom was a teacher. I grew up living around university campuses so I was just always in an academic setting and am in tune with the academic schedule. I've got it in me; my

> wife and I were talking about this last night, just being born into the profession. Some young teachers right now don't have natural reactions to situations that arise. I am bossy and opinionated, but have a natural way of dealing with students. I love it. I guess I worked to figure out which direction I wanted to go and my mom suggested I try subbing and I just did it on a whim. I went and got all the appropriate information, went through orientation, and ended up at Crestview High School. (H. Miller, interview, February 2, 2003)

Henry's road to the profession was non-traditional; however, his role as an AVID teacher is enhanced by the fact that he has many life experiences from which to draw in identifying with the needs of his students.

Outside of school, Henry lives south of his students in an apartment. He has been married for two years to a woman who has also chosen teaching as her profession and is studying to become a teacher of young children. He has an avid interest in technology and single-handedly taught himself web-page design and created the website for the school. He and his students maintain the website during the year and seek to create a forum for students to present themselves in a positive light, to counteract the treatment they receive from the city at large. I heard students comment several times, "Why we only in the paper when something bad happens, but not when we win a game or something like that." As

a result of his interest in media communications, his AVID students have access to modern computers and are quite technologically savvy.

Henry became an AVID teacher after student teaching in the program. His student teaching semester was spent in Sara Turner's room, the current AVID site coordinator, and that is where he learned the ins and outs of the program. "I just liked what they were doing and I went on a field trip with them to Houston that year.… I got spoiled with the seniors; even at that age, they made it very easy to see that it was something that I wanted to be a part of" (H. Miller, interview, February 7, 2003). Henry fell into teaching AVID through his student teaching placement; however, he chose to continue at this school and in the AVID program when during his pre-service semester a position opened up at Regis for an English/AVID instructor. He was the logical fit and signed on to return in the fall as a full-time teacher.

> The senior class is just a very special combination of people. When you imagine freshmen as seniors and what we want them to look like when they get here, this is it. Going through my junior class right now I've got some who will be there and some who are not where they need to be. (H. Miller, interview, February 2, 2003)

He has been handed the bulk of the AVID load with the departure of Sara, the original teacher of these students. He currently teaches one section of seniors, one section of juniors, and two classes of sophomore AVID students. I spent the

majority of my time observing his seniors minus one day spent observing his sophomore AVID class.

CLASSROOM FEATURES

The first thing I notice as I approach Henry's room is a huge bulletin board full of what look to be award certificates. I stop to read them and realize they are college acceptance letters for Henry's senior AVID class. It is an impressive display and covers half of a large wall outside of his room. The wall helps to emphasize AVID's goal of transforming the school and student culture by calling attention to student success. In this instance, it appears to have worked as there are many students not enrolled in AVID gathered around it reading names of students and universities.

I walk inside his room and immediately notice that it is at least twice the size of an ordinary classroom. The most prominent feature of the room is the presence of round tables and chairs as opposed to the traditional student desks. In addition, computers line the side and back walls of the classroom. As you walk through the door, the teacher area is to the left. It is obvious by the position of the desk, computer, and file cabinets that Henry allows his students to freely move in and out of this space. Often, they are at "his" computer and sitting at "his" desk. Absent from his desk is the common chaos seen on a teacher's desk—there are papers, but they are neatly stacked in a corner of his desk. He has two filing cabinets near his desk that are chock full of various teacher information. Behind

his desk sits a table holding his computer, printer, paper, and reference material. The bulletin board behind his desk is used for informative papers such as bell schedules, early release dates, staff phone numbers, and other administrative information. It is full from top to bottom and above it sits a beautiful collection of copies of famous artwork.

To the right of the door is a bookshelf full of materials on colleges, financial aid information, Cornell notepaper, and other reference materials strictly for AVID student use. This wall begins the amazing display of posters throughout the room. All over the room are posters, filling half the walls, of famous artwork, literary figures, and famous people in history. Henry has done a good job of representing varied cultures and sexes in these posters. Students can look on the walls to find representatives of their gender and ethnicity. Henry also has pop-culture posters such as The Ramones to demonstrate his personal taste. The posters bring the room to life, making it a place for students to feel at home.

Computers sit on rectangular tables lining the walls. The computers are new, which is obvious due to the number of flat-screen and laptop versions present. There are chairs for each computer and several printers around as well. The computers give the classroom a modern look—an observer could easily mistake this classroom for one in a more affluent area. I have to admit surprise when I saw all of the equipment here; it went against my stereotypes about what an inner city classroom is supposed to look like. As in Kris's room, the number of

computers available for Internet use went against findings that students in low-income schools are often not given access to modern technology and are thus unprepared for work in modern society (Fisher, Dwyer, & Yocam, 1996).

Henry's chalkboards and dry-erase boards are not crowded but used for items like objectives for each class, class activities for the day, and notable quotes. My favorite quote was by Kurt Vonnegut and read "High School is closer to the core of the American experience than anything else I can think of." Henry is not shy with his students about his opinions or political leanings. His life-size cutout of George W. Bush often had derogatory statements pasted above its head. The top left corner of his front board records the mileage he is up to in running as he shares this information with his students each week. Above the front board are pictures of his students from their freshmen year until now—there is a sense of student ownership in this class; it almost resembles their own room, as the posters are relevant and modern and the photographs on bulletin boards are of them at school. The best part of the room to me was the extensive reading corner located in front of Henry's desk. There is a couch, a papasan chair, and two bookshelves full of books for students to peruse as they sit on the comfortable furniture. Interestingly, I never saw the AVID students use this area—they were more inclined to be at the computer or at their desks working, Then again there were not many opportunities for these students to sit and read; they were busy applying to college and filling out financial aid and scholarship applications.

Henry's room is warm and welcoming. Students are given permission to roam, and are not just stuck to their chairs. It reminds me of an advertising office where movement abounds and the room is colorful and lively. He has taken time to create a classroom that extends beyond the traditional institutional look of a secondary classroom.

HIS STUDENTS

A walk into Henry's room reveals a much different student than the ones in the freshmen AVID classes. The ethnicities represented are similar: 5 Hispanic and 12 African American students. However, these students are young adults; the boys are tall and look like young men on the brink of adulthood. Unlike the freshmen girls, these girls are no longer little girls—they have matured and look and act older than the 15-year-olds I observed just an hour before. Still, the teenage culture is revealed in their clothing choices. Some of the boys wear an interesting ensemble of knitted sweaters with matching stocking caps while others dress like the freshmen I saw, in athletic jerseys and jeans. The girls move in and out of sophistication, some days wearing skirts, blouses and heels, and other days T-shirts and hip-hugger jeans are abundant. Two girls in particular seem to have bold fashion senses and one day come in wearing white sweat pants that say "bootylicious" across their backsides in red.

THEMES

The core themes of caring, high expectations, student responsibility, flexibility, and voluntary participation were evident in Henry's pedagogical style. These themes, though present, manifested themselves in very different ways than in the other two AVID classrooms I observed. On any given day, you could walk into his room and have trouble locating him; he is typically working one-on-one with a student while the class works on independent projects. His pedagogy is both unique to his personality and to the level of students that he teaches.

As a researcher, his style posed problems for me in that it was difficult to generate data in his classroom. I record in my fieldnotes, "I am not sure what to write down, everyone seems to be doing their own thing" (January 9, 2003). I identified the same five themes, but the way these were manifested was completely different in his classroom than in the other two classrooms. The themes were identified less by what he said and more by what he did; the individual interactions I observed between Henry and his students were powerful and provide rich data that exposed these themes. These themes also came through in the interviews I held with Henry throughout the semester.

Early in my research, I remark about the difference between the senior and freshmen AVID classes:

> It is difficult to know what to observe and record in this class…. As sophomores, their class functioned more like a traditional class, they

needed their teacher more. Maybe what I'm seeing is a result of their grade level and feeling a bit of "senioritus" (Fieldnotes, February 3, 2003)

I have never taught seniors so I am unaware of appropriate instruction, particularly at this point in the year. The interaction, or lack thereof, appeared to work for this class. The students worked at their own pace while Henry monitored their progress. Henry attributes their ability to be self-disciplined to the teacher who got them to this point, Sara Turner. "I attribute that class mostly to [Sara] because she was so hard-nosed with them" (H. Miller, personal communication, April 7, 2003). It appears that discipline and structure were present early on, but that Henry has been able to ease up on strict requirements and structured activities as his students have matured. As a result, they are able to spend their senior year focused on the important goal of getting into college.

Caring

Henry conveys caring within his goal of having individual time with his students: "I would prefer to have no more than 10 minutes where I'm talking at all, and then send them off in a direction and that just allows me to be more one-on-one" (H. Miller, interview, February 7, 2003). This was a daily occurrence; he did not lecture to his students, but was always circulating around tables and available to assist them. Part of this was a result of his students being seniors and more mature than freshmen. Also, those that were less motivated have already left the AVID program. Akin to Kris, Henry has thorough knowledge of the personal

and academic lives of his students. When a student returned to school after having a baby, he inquired, “How are you doing? Are you alone in this or is Dad still in the picture?” I did not hear her response, but I saw him listen as he made eye contact and then offer advice about how to catch up. “Here’s what we’ve been doing. You can turn in all of this stuff together so long as it is in by final exam time.” He seemed genuinely concerned for her welfare and did not dismiss her as some teachers might just because she is now a mother. We shared a conversation about her situation in which he adamantly stated, “She will be fine. She is smart, motivated, and has a lot of support.”

Henry demonstrated care for his students by being available, both during class and before and after school. When students had questions, Henry stopped whatever he was doing and went to their tables to answer questions. There were a few students who needed to have assignments explained repeatedly. “Mr. Miller, how did you say to structure this outline again?” a male student wearing a bright orange sweater and matching stocking cap calls across the room. Henry finishes his work with another student and makes his way over to the student’s table. “Okay, Rudy, what’s up?” Rudy leans back in his chair and looks toward the sky. “I forgot what you said about this.” Henry patiently responds, “Just follow the model here. You are basically trying to give yourself a picture of what you want to say. Make sure you include a thesis sentence and topic sentences to guide your reader.” Rudy scratches his pencil across the paper, writing quickly as he smacks

his bright green gum. Henry waits as he writes and then looks over his shoulder at his work. “That’s better—just structure ideas about main points that will support your thesis statement. Refer back to Tonisha’s outline, it’s exactly what I’m asking for.” Henry sits with Rudy most of the period, helping him create his outline. It is important to Henry that this student understand the assignment as it is a skill he will need for college writing.

The most poignant example of Henry caring for his students occurred after a tragedy at the high school, one that will be discussed in depth in Chapter Eight. The encounter was particularly amazing because Henry had witnessed the incident firsthand and was dealing with his own emotions. Yet, he put the needs of his students before himself by focusing on what type of support they would need from him. He easily could have stayed home and “hidden under a rock” (H. Miller, interview, April 7, 2003) like he wanted to, but instead, he created a letter to his students expressing his own sorrow and helping them to deal with theirs. He wisely made his response student-centered:

> I was really concentrating on how they were reacting because there was just no telling what was going to happen last week. There was no way to predict—as far as planning or anything in my classroom—there was no way to gauge what was going to happen and from the feedback I’ve heard from my kids, there were a lot of teachers who did not provide any time to really discuss.… I spent so much time just trying to be really observant

> and really conscientious of what they were thinking, so I wasn't thinking about my own reaction at all. (H. Miller, interview, April 7, 2003)

He gave them time that week to journal feelings and provided CDs to record music that would help them heal. He made his goals explicit: "I'm not your teacher this week; we're human beings that shared something and you know we're in the process of figuring out where we go from here." This experience was an example of Henry making himself vulnerable to his students and allowing them to share feelings in order to promote healing. This example demonstrates that Henry cared enough about his students to place curriculum needs and due dates aside in order to focus on their immediate need to be healed, an action that strongly ties into his ability to be flexible, another theme I identified within his practice. The two themes were strongly intertwined in the aftermath of this life-altering event.

The result of this shared encounter was a call to action by Henry. "We need to respond to this at some level. You guys can get on the website and respond or write a letter to the editor like Ms. Jones' class did." He was not satisfied with the fact that the city media had chosen to attack Regis' student body. He cared enough about the representation of his students that he sacrificed class time to see that they could respond appropriately. Both he and his students

> …had a sense of ownership over that. They were like, you know, they were the ones that had to respond and say what was needed and what

> happened. That shift was more active; it got them moving, definitely. (H. Miller, interview, April 7, 2003)

I witnessed many students getting on the website during class and responding not only to the tragedy, but also highlighting the wonderful things about the school, stressing that they were a family and would make it through this tragedy together. Their pride in their school was apparent and their frustration with their disrespectful treatment by the media was obvious as well. I believe Henry showed an extraordinary amount of caring in this situation because he put aside curriculum concerns and concentrated on healing his students and providing a forum for them to discuss the many positive attributes of their school in the midst of an unfortunate event that had the potential to tarnish the entire school.

High Expectations

Henry's position as a senior-level teacher is a bit different than that of a freshmen-level teacher. The seniors have had three years to adjust to campus and to understand the role of AVID in their academic careers. Most have had the benefit of witnessing their own success and are confident in their academic ability. Henry focuses his efforts on getting them to set high expectations for themselves. "Now for me, I identify the people that are doing well and just try to exploit that instead of being upset because they are not [all] meeting my expectations" (H. Miller, interview, February 7, 2003). He has the luxury of having extremely motivated students, those that have survived three years of

AVID successfully. As a result, I never heard him discuss his high expectations with his students; however, this theme was made explicit within the context of our conversations.

Henry is clear about what he expects from seniors, sharing his philosophy with me during an interview:

> At this point, when they get here, they should be almost entirely independent as far as how they're approaching their studies, you know, taking care of their calendars, making sure they are hitting due dates, understanding tutorials, and really taking advantage of the use of their time. At this point, I am not in front of the class. They need to be operating like a college classroom more than anything and that's certainly what the seniors have achieved. (H. Miller, interview, April 7, 2003)

Within my observations, I remark on this presence of the college-like atmosphere repeatedly: "The class is even more self-sufficient today, if that is possible. The kids are working intently on college applications" (Fieldnotes, February 12, 2003). They each had a laptop and stacks of papers that they were focused on throughout the class period.

Henry's students have heard his expectations for them for the past three years and Henry wisely knows it is time to let them make and meet their own expectations for achievement in school. "What I'm asking them to consider is not something unique to Regis High School, but in whatever college campus they go

to they will have to set and meet their own expectations" (H. Miller, interview, April 7, 2003). His students were self-disciplined, motivated, and on-task, even toward the end of the year when many seniors get restless and quit working. His expectations at this point were that they would do the work needed to apply to college, apply for financial aid, and maintain their grades.

Henry's aspirations for his AVID students are that they will adopt a particular mindset about success in school:

> I think it's more like creating a culture to where it's an absolute, it's for sure set in stone if you're coming in here that's the commitment you're making. I think just establishing expectations that it's a four-year university and that's what we're going for. We're not trying to get you into a community college. AVID is definitely making waves, as far as that goes. (H. Miller, interview, April 7, 2003)

In these words, Henry supports the AVID goal that a four-year university is the only acceptable path for his students. While this goal does set high expectations, it fails to consider the idea that perhaps this is not the right goal for all students. The majority of his seniors have met his expectations by being accepted to four-year universities. Accepted, however, does not necessarily mean they will attend, a fact that is discussed later in this chapter. His present focus is on getting them to have high expectations for themselves in college. "You guys will do well in college. You have all the skills needed and the right motivation. You have created the

mold for other AVID students to follow." The students now have the difficult job of moving from guided high school study to the independent study required at the college level.

Student Responsibility

Henry must focus on student responsibility because his seniors will be at colleges next year, places where there will be no one to remind them that they must have an assignment in by a specific deadline. These seniors have to be completely self-sufficient and Henry feels it is his job to be sure that they leave high school prepared for the responsibilities of college. During the college application process, he provides Internet-ready laptops and books about colleges and lets the students use class time to work. This results in a focused classroom of students working toward their shared goal of doing well in their advanced courses and meeting college entrance requirements.

The independence of this class was revealed even on days that Henry was not present in the classroom. On two occasions, I observed his classes with substitute teachers and nothing changed: the students continued to work on college applications and financial aid forms. There were no examples of students who chose to waste time or asked to wander the halls, a common requestmade in many classrooms with the presence of a substitute. The students did not take out cell phones and personal materials or steal his personal items in his absence as Kris's students did. This was in large part due to their maturity level and the

nature of their work; they had to meet deadlines for college acceptance and to receive grant and scholarship money. The responsibility to meet the deadlines was theirs alone. However, the fact that they were able to work independently so well says much about their experience in AVID and the sense of personal responsibility they had been taught and had adopted.

I was able to observe Henry's sophomore level AVID class on one occasion and found that he made student responsibility an explicit goal in that classroom. I learned during this single observation experience that Henry begins to teach responsibility early in the students' high-school career. This class was larger and more active than the seniors, a fact I noted immediately as I entered the room. Every round table was full and it sounded as if every student was talking. Henry stood at the front of the room waiting for them to quiet down, which they did after about five minutes, and then he gave instructions:

> We need to move the projects I assigned last week until after Spring Break because the need to prepare for the TAKS test is more prominent right now. All of the AVID prep in the world will not matter if you don't pass this test. If you don't pass it, you won't graduate.

His soliloquy is met with groans of displeasure and side conversations begin immediately. Henry raises his voice level. "If you do not want to be here, then go—this is not the YMCA!"

He holds his stare and waits for a response, but then lapses back into his relaxed style. " I am glad no one left," he smiles and the class laughs with him. He continues, "The fact is, you have to pass this test. I want to help you, but it is ultimately up to you to do the prep work. I want to provide this time for you, but not if you are not going to use it." His class quiets down and appears to soak in the information as they begin to take pens and paper out of their backpacks. Henry has given them the choice of working on test-preparation or not, making them fully understand that they are responsible for the consequences of their choice. His ability to give them choices and let them live with the consequences of those choices at the sophomore level leads to their ability to perfect this skill by the time they are seniors.

In terms of student continuation in AVID for the underclassmen, Henry matter-of-factly states that the student chooses his or her own destiny in the program:

> Umm… there's an exit interview—they've known, they've made the choice every time they don't participate in tutorials, class projects… every single time they do that, they're reminded. (H. Miller, interview, April 7, 2003)

His comment refers his sophomore- and junior-level AVID classes, where he works to teach his students how to be accountable for their own behavior and choices. This necessarily involves student responsibility; they have to know that

their actions will lead to success or failure; there is no blaming the teacher in his room.

As I observe the sophomore class, Henry talks animatedly with a tall, thin Hispanic girl about her choice to take easy courses. He is standing with her at the doorway, speaking loudly, which is very uncharacteristic of him: " If you drop that course, you are out of AVID." The girl looks at him through bangs that cover her eyes, but does not respond. Henry continues, " Is that the choice you're making?" His voice is stern, he seems annoyed, and his approach is one I have not seen from him. She continues to look at him until it is apparent that she is not going to change her mind. She slowly backs out of the room and Henry turns around to face his class, clearly agitated. When I ask him about it later he comments,

> She had just transferred in from another school and I was frustrated…. The fact is that you cannot fail classes, and to get out of the mentality where that's okay. If you're running a straight AVID game, then that's our curriculum, and other schools might have a different model than Regis. I go through their choice sheets with them and make sure they are taking challenging teachers and classes. If they want to make this happen, these are the courses you need to take, these are the teachers who will put you to work. (H. Miller, interview, February 7, 2004)

His reminds his sophomores that day to “please make sure you guys are enrolled in honors courses that will challenge you and prepare you for the rigors of college.” In making student responsibility an explicit focus in his underclassmen courses, he slowly weans them from depending on him to learning to be responsible for their own successes or failures.

Flexibility

At no point in the AVID training I attended did the instructors discuss how to adapt teaching at the senior level. A senior-level teacher necessarily has to stray from the predictable routines each week in the AVID classroom. For the seniors, the most important part of the year is the college application and financial aid process. A senior-level teacher must spend the bulk of the year focused on these two objectives (Mehan et al., 1996). Henry maintained a Tuesday/Thursday schedule of tutorials, while the rest of the week’s activities centered on these two activities. As Henry aptly states, “ I keep a real accurate gauge of where they are…. [It’s] like having the same objectives but multiple ways to get to it” (H. Miller, interview, February 7, 2004).

Henry’s flexibility is demonstrated best in his ability to let students work at their own pace and on their own assignments. Students are scattered across the room, some on computers, others filling out paperwork at their desks. They flow in and out of the classroom freely, some to the library and others to the counselor.

It is a busy classroom, but in a different way than the other two AVID classrooms I observed. Students work independently and Henry does a lot of one-on-one instruction. I observe him talking to a student in the center of the room. The student, Charles, asks, “Mr. Miller, can you proof my essay for me?” He smiles enticingly at Henry, revealing a gold-capped tooth on the top right. He places the essay right in front of Henry’s face and makes his smile even bigger, if that is possible. Henry looks at me, “How can I resist that?” He promptly sits down and begins to read the essay. Charles begins a game of paper football with a classmate as he waits.

The best example of Henry’s flexibility in teaching was the week after the tragedy at Regis High School. He had his own emotions to deal with at this time, but thought about the needs of his students as well. He announced to his class, “we are not going to worry about the research paper at this point. I will move deadlines and shorten assignments as we go. Right now the focus is on healing you guys.” As a follow-up, he shortened the research assignment to include only a thesis sentence, topic sentences, an outline of the chapters, and a reference page rather than a finished research paper. In this instance, his care for his students guided his actions and he was flexible with due dates. This was a conscious decision and one that forced Henry to

> Look at what sorts of products and objectives I wanted to meet.… I had a lot that we were about to jump into and I’m finding myself changing it as

> far as what they're producing and a lot of them, due to this event, have altered that. (H. Miller, interview, April 7, 2003)

His final-six-week plans changed completely in response to this tragic event, yet he was flexible enough to allow that to happen and not get caught up in specific objectives he was supposed to meet. The needs of his students dictated his actions; as a result, the outlines and reference pages they turned in were thorough and complete. Given more time, each student could have converted his or her work into a cohesive, college-level essay. Students were able to pay attention to the shortened assignment and do a thorough job on it. Henry was able to provide the flexibility needed to insure that the students could do a quality job.

Voluntary Participation

Henry does not actively recruit AVID students because he does not have to; students look at his board of college acceptances and flock to him to get involved. Qualified students are allowed to apply for positions in AVID during their freshmen, sophomore, and junior years. The current senior class has inspired others to want to get involved in AVID. As a result, he can take a hard line on students who do not take AVID seriously. He believes that students who desire to be in the program will do the work required to be admitted and remain in AVID. "They must bring in the applications.… They have to make a choice between AVID and electives. If you want to do AVID for four years that usually means summer school at least one summer" (H. Miller, interview, April 7, 2003). Many

students must make a choice between AVID and athletics or band, and those who decide it is worth the trade off must enroll ready to work and do what it takes to get to college.

Henry refers to students who are "hovering around the edges of the program" in our interview and remarks that they would be positive additions to AVID. Yet, "A lot of them are ones that I've known about and have known are going to be in AVID, but again that takes them bringing in the applications, as well, so many that I'm thinking will be in won't due to their own lack of initiative" (H. Miller, interview, April 7, 2003).

At the senior level it is particularly important that the students are there on their own accord as it a self-run class. Henry reports that he has had very few people leave AVID, but those who have know that "they have made a choice to not do what it takes to succeed" (H. Miller, interview, April 7, 2003). He has a senior student who left AVID for a year, but returned because he realized the benefits of the help that AVID offers. I witnessed this same student tell Kris's freshmen, "Don't quit. I know it's hard—notebooks, Cornell notes and all that—but it is definitely worth it. I left and found out the hard way I needed AVID." Voluntary participation is also important for AVID because this same quality will be needed for success in college. Students have to want to be in college to put in the required work to obtain a degree.

Toward the end of the year there are students who begin to have second thoughts about going away to school. For many students, it is a practical worry when scholarships and financial aid have not come through. Tasha, a light-skinned African American girl enters class one day and declares matter-of-factly, "Mr. Miller, I am not going to Baylor after all." Henry crosses the room and pulls up a chair close to her. "Why not?" I am interested as well because Baylor University is all Tasha has talked about since I began my observations. "I just don't want to…" she says hesitantly, looking down at the table. Henry leans closer to her. "Is it money?" She raises her head, but does not meet his gaze. "Yes," she whispers. Henry shakes his head and suggests, "Have you exhausted all of your financial resources?" Tasha nods her head and looks at him. Henry responds by pointing her toward additional websites that offer financial aid. A few weeks later, Tasha enters the room exuberantly, "Mr. Miller—I did it—I got the scholarship!" He smiles broadly at her; for this student the money came through and she is able to attend the college of her dreams.

Most of the students I observed ultimately choose to go on to college. All but one stayed in the state, a common practice for these students due to lack of financial resources to go out of state (H. Miller, personal communication, May, 2003). The steps for getting into college and then actually going must be made voluntarily by each student. Henry can merely offer a listening ear and assure them that they are academically ready to get the job done.

Henry's ability to weave caring, high expectations, student responsibility, flexibility, and voluntary participation into his AVID classroom helped him establish and maintain a strong AVID program. These themes played out differently in his classroom than in the other two AVID classrooms because of Henry's easygoing teaching style and the fact that his was a classroom of seniors, well-trained in the expectations and routine of AVID.

HENRY'S PEDAGOGY

In writing about Henry, I was struck by the difference between Henry's data chapter and the data chapters of other two AVID teachers. As I wrote his chapter I was concerned about the lack of teacher-student dialogue present, until I realized that his pedagogy does not lend itself to lecture and discussion, but is powerful and compelling in other ways.

In portraying Henry's teaching style, I had difficulty identifying orderly themes for his practice. His style is so laid back and learner-centered that putting a label on what he does is problematic. Finally, I discovered three roles that he enacts in the classroom that define his personal style and the relationship he shares with his students. Henry executes the following roles in his classroom: director, coach, and facilitator—all of which create a unique AVID classroom of independent learners preparing to leave high school and move on to higher education.

The Director: A Student-Centered Classroom

Henry is a relaxed teacher in terms of letting students guide activities. He does not allow complete freedom, but typically allows for choices by students on how to spend their time. My first couple of weeks was spent observing his direction of two simultaneous activities: planning and budgeting a senior trip and preparing for the last SAT exam of the year. He directed both of these groups, providing guidelines and suggestions, but students were largely working independently, revealing early on that this was a student-centered classroom. Henry spent no time standing in front of the class giving instructions or information, practices that were common in the freshmen AVID classrooms. Within one of the activities that he directed, he allowed for some fun and play in an otherwise focused and serious classroom.

As the bell rings on my first day in the classroom, I note that students seem oblivious to it and continue personal conversations for quite some time. Henry moves slowly from his desk to the front of the room. His first attempts to get class started are unsuccessful. “Guys, I need your attention,” he says, barely audible above the sound in the room. He continues to stand at the front, determined to wait. The students continue to talk and laugh amongst themselves, unaware that class has started. Finally, an astute student sitting close to Mr. Miller notices him and yells, “Guys, Mr. Miller needs our attention!” The class responds by getting quiet. I hear a few say “Sorry, Mr. Miller” as they make their way

toward the circular tables dispersed throughout the room. Henry smiles and says, “Thanks, Tricia—now that I have your attention, we need to talk about a few things.” A few chairs squeak across the floor as students move them away from computers and to their places around the circular tables. Henry continues his instructions:

> We have two distinct tasks to work on over the next couple of weeks, so I would like to get organized today so that each day when you come in you can be about the business of getting to work. There are a significant number of you that are taking the SAT exam in a few weeks. This is your last opportunity to take it and raise your scores.

Several students on the far right side of the room greet this comment with groans. Henry glances in their direction, smiles, and continues:

> We will be spending the next few weeks preparing for that exam, drilling and discussing test taking strategies. The rest of you have a task as well. I have been informed that we will be allowed to take an AVID senior trip at the end of the year, but we need a plan as far as where we will go, when we will go, and how we will get the money. You guys need to research and come up with a plan to present to the rest of the class. I want to see visual aids—full formal-presentation style.

The students who will be allowed to plan the trip respond with high-fives and cheers of “yes!” They immediately begin naming places. “Oh yea, Hawaii is

lookin' good!" Henry laughs good-naturedly, then stops the banter for a moment and says, "Assign roles: a secretary to write down ideas, a fiscal manager to do the budget, people to research places and prices. This is a lot of work. I expect something formal to present to the class as soon as the end of next week." He has already lost them as they excitedly begin talking about senior trip events. Henry yells over them, "Okay SAT guys, come over to this side of the room," pointing to the right, "and the rest of you on the left. Here are markers, dry-erase boards, and the computers are available as well." Somehow they hear his instructions over the noise of chairs being scraped across the floor and backpacks being dropped and begin to move to the appropriate places.

The students planning the trip are excitedly calling out, "Bahamas, man, yeah!" A self-appointed leader takes control at this point. "Come on ya'll, you know we can't be going to no Bahamas. Let's talk about New Orleans or somewhere closer. Tasha, how you comin' on the Internet search?" she yells across the room. "I'm working," Tasha calls back. The students cluster together and begin to compose a letter to possible corporate donors. "Mr. Miller, can you come here for a sec and proof this letter?" Henry leaves his SAT kids with a task, moves to the left side of the room and sits down to read the letter thoroughly. His response is passionate:

> Your letter is full of victimology—you are not poor victims. You have overcome obstacles. Present yourselves as proud, not as victims. You need

> to re-write that letter, talking about all you have accomplished, how many of you are going to college despite the obstacles you have faced. You have to give them a reason to want to just give you money, and its not because you are some poor victims that deserve a handout.

Again, his director role surfaces as he does not mandate how to change the letter, but steers them in a more productive direction. This is an example of Henry making explicit the culture of power – he does not want his students to represent themselves as anything but capable, deserving individuals. His comments about their letter address stereotypes that the outside world may have of them. A male student responds with, "Man, Mr. Miller, give us a break." The response is playful and more a result of not wanting to re-do the thing more than anything else. He and his fellow classmates tear a new page out of a notebook and begin a new letter. The candid response from Henry is listened to respectfully and responded to in a way that shows respect for his position and opinion. The next step in the fundraising process is a bit lighter and unites the class in fun.

Henry brings a sense of playfulness and fun to his classroom as well. To help his students raise money for their trip, he lets them film commercials to show on the television announcements that air in all classes. These commercials will advertise the Regis Stop, a snack bar where AVID students will sell candy to the general population to help pay for their senior trip. This activity also serves as an outlet for Henry's enthusiastic interest in media. A tall African American student

dances over to the CD player atop Henry's file cabinet. The static is loud as the student moves the tuner to find an appropriate radio station. When the song "Complicated" by Avril Lavigne begins to play, an African American student yells out, "Get that White music off the radio." A female African American student replies, "Ya'll got to be open to other things—Black people ignorant, that's why we so behind everybody."

The conversation stops there, but I note the interesting exchange of words between the two students and wonder if being in AVID has taught the more open-minded student this idea. I record in my fieldnotes, "This student is bright, going to college, and obviously recognizes that there exists a world outside of the one in which she currently exists" (February 14, 2003).

The static signaling the turn of the dial is heard again and stops as loud rap music blares from the radio. "Oh yeah, that's what I'm talking about!" says Linda, the girl who complained about the first song. She begins to dance to the music. Most of the students begin to move to the rhythm of the music until Henry re-focuses their energy. "Okay, that will work, but turn it down. Let's get ready to film." The videographer takes the camera and clicks a few buttons in preparation. "I'm ready," he states. Henry takes over. "Okay, group one, let's get into your positions." The group of about 10 students moves to the right side of the room and begins to rearrange furniture.

Tables are scraped across the floor, chairs are stacked up—the noise of metal hitting metal is deafening. The lights are dimmed, the music level rises, and the camera man yells, “Action!” Immediately, the girls dance on one side of the room, the boys on the other. A young man says to another, “Watch me get some digits.” He saunters over to the other side of the room, still moving to the beat of the music,

“Hey baby, what’s your name?” he says this while making sure to breathe heavily on the girl. She tries to keep from laughing, turns to her friend and says, “Oohh.” He continues, “Yo, baby what’s your name—can I have your number?” She looks to her friend and says, “Ooh, no.” He is relentless: “Aw, come on baby, you know I look good!” She responds, “Your breath needs a 911—you need to go to the Regis Stop for some gum!”

The room erupts in laughter; students stop dancing and laugh hysterically. Their attempt to ad lib a commercial for their fundraiser has been successful. Henry and I are laughing hard as well. Another girl begins to do a solo dance in the middle of the room as students gather around and cheer her on, forgetting for the moment that they are in a classroom and not at an actual party. Henry turns on the lights. “Okay guys, that was great. I can’t stop laughing. We may need to re-shoot some of that tomorrow and then we will edit and be ready to show this on the video announcements.” Students are still laughing and repeating lines as they scrape the tables across the floor back to their original spots.

This class day is revealing to me in terms of watching Henry direct an assignment, but allowing students to have fun while meeting his objectives. The students had a great time and produced something tangible toward their goal of raising money for their trip. The students were focused on this project because of its applicability to their lives and because of the freedom they were given to create it.

Meanwhile, the students preparing for the SAT were hard at work in preparation. As the fundraising group worked on their own, Henry guided these seniors in test-taking strategies. They took practice tests every day, reviewing each question and how the students arrived at a particular answer. At the end of two weeks, the SAT work was completed and these students were prepared to take the test. Henry asked nervously afterward, “How did it go?” A student sitting near him replied sadly, “I don’t think it went too well,” but did not elaborate. “I am sure you did fine,” Henry said confidently and added, “I thought about you guys all day on Saturday.” Henry’s ability to allow his students the freedom to concentrate on test preparation or prepare for the senior AVID trip, depending on their needs, revealed his ability to manage simultaneous activities and keep his students engaged in the learning process.

Henry worked as a director of activities and created a classroom that was centered on the needs of his students. His ability to do this and their ability to respond were related to his laid-back approach to teaching. Henry does not feel

the need to control his students or talk at them. Instead, he feels it is his responsibility to create a classroom in where "at this point, if it's worked right, the senior AVID teacher shouldn't be up there. It should be entire practice by now and it is in this class" (H. Miller, interview, April 7, 2003). He recognizes his role as director and his students' roles as participants in the classroom, making their own choices and responding appropriately to his guidance.

The Coach: Pushing and Prodding

Henry acted as a coach in the college application process. He was diligent and purposeful in seeing that his students spent their class time on this one activity and that they met application deadlines. This activity was one in which Henry had to push his seniors a bit, constantly reminding them of due dates, letting them call home for needed information or see the counselor to obtain transcripts. No activity was denied so long as its purpose was to complete these applications.

After a few weeks of work, Raphael, a bright student-athlete with lots of college opportunities, plops into his seat and lays his head down. "Awww, Mr. Miller, I am so tired." Henry saunters over to him, places his hand on his shoulder and commiserates, "Aren't we all, Raphael—now get going!" Raphael smiles, smacks his gum loudly and pulls his scholarship papers from his bag and begins to slowly fill out blanks. Henry addresses the class. "Okay, the rest of you, let's get our stuff out." The tired seniors pause and stare blankly for a moment, then

begin to take out items from their backpack and get to work. Henry circulates the room thoroughly, stopping to help whoever asks.

On several occasions, he takes time to have a one-on-one conversation with a student. He sits with Damon and asks, “Where are you visiting this weekend?” Damon replies proudly, “Georgetown.” Henry inquires further, “Awesome, when do you leave? Hang on, let me make a call for you.” Henry steps over to the phone beside his desk, calls someone and returns. He tells Damon, “Okay—that was Ms. Turner, her sister lives in D.C. and she would be happy to meet with you and show you around—are you interested?” Damon smiles, “That would be good, I don’t know the schedules the coaches have for me, though.” Henry writes a name and number on a scratch piece of paper and slides it over to Damon. “Well, you work it out,” Henry tells him. “Here is her number and she would be glad to show you around.” Henry pats Damon’s shoulder and moves to speak to another student. His personal interest in each student’s college search is demonstrated by encounters similar to this one. Henry desires to see them apply and get accepted to college and will go beyond his classroom teacher duties to see that happen. He often makes calls to contacts or colleges on behalf of the students, anything to make the process less daunting for them. His role is similar to a high-school athletic coach who bridges the transition from high school to college. A coach guides his or her athletes in their recruiting trips and college

decisions. Henry does this as well, offering opinions when asked and providing a forum for his students to discuss the decision of where to attend college.

He provides additional motivation to complete college applications and financial aid forms, in part, by making it a grade:

> They get 50 points for a scholarship that requires them to write an essay and then 10 points for extra scholarships—that will be due on Friday and that's going to be 25% of their final grade. So, if nothing else, by the end of the week, everybody will have applied for scholarships. (H. Miller, interview, February 7, 2003)

The students' hard work and Henry's prodding during the month of February paid off well as most students receive acceptance to college, with many getting some type of financial help. The aforementioned student, Damon, accepts a full ride to Georgetown as others choose in-state colleges with significant amounts of scholarship money to support them. Each day, a student comes in and shares with the class, "I got into [name of college]!" The class claps and gives high-fives to the successful student. Henry smiles proudly from his place in the room, looking like a coach whose athletes have just won the district championship. He has pushed and prodded them to this point and is able to truly share in their joy and success.

Henry is unrelenting in the pursuit of college for his kids even as the acceptances roll in. He continues to press them on deadlines, encouraging them to

apply to numerous colleges so that they will have a choice of where to attend. “I know you got into Southwest Texas, Gloria, but keep on applying—you may get better offers somewhere else.” He also continues to provide information about financial aid and scholarships. He is resourceful in finding money and shares information freely with his students. Part of his persistence, I surmise, is his pride in their achievements and the recognition it gets the AVID program.

As Henry steps into class in late February, he is smiling proudly and zigzags his way quickly through desks to the front of the room. “Attention, guys!” As is typical of this class, it takes a few attempts to get their attention. “Yesterday I attended a district-wide AVID meeting and we talked about college acceptance rates. You guys, here at Regis High School, have 41 acceptance letters, higher than any other school in the city.” A faint, “We bad, we know it!” is heard as the students and Henry erupt in laughter. Henry points to the hallway, “You guys should be really proud, just look at our board out there—it is amazing!” He confides in me later about the school-wide effect of that board: “Other students not in the AVID program admire that board a lot. I have had students come to me wanting to be in AVID because they have seen this board. When you look at an AVID class and where you want them to be as seniors, this is it” (H. Miller, personal communication, May 7, 2003). The students smile and seem happy in the praise but not surprised. Henry routinely praises his kids; they are accustomed to hearing how awesome they are. Clearly, their success is his success and he enjoys

the accolades both he and his students receive, akin to the coach-athlete relationship in which the coach shares the success and failures of his team.

Henry's help in navigating the college applications and financial aid packages is an invaluable and necessary part of his job. As noted in Mehan's (1996) work on AVID,

> The most striking writing activity in the AVID elective classes involved seniors in their preparation for college entry. Seniors were coached on how to complete college application forms, and financial aid forms, write college essays and personal statements. (p. 189)

A senior-level AVID teacher must be well versed in these areas as he or she spends the entire first semester and beyond focused on these activities. Henry fulfills this responsibility aptly and completely. His laptop computers are always ready to be connected to the Internet so that students can research college campuses and availability of financial aid. He provides Internet addresses of various websites to aid them in their search. He is available both during class and before and after school to proofread forms and essays. He is diligent in his focus on the college application process, so much so that all other curriculum activities are put aside for this purpose. Again, his coaching role surfaces; a good coach tends to concentrate on the game of the week, placing all other objectives aside. Henry pushes his students toward the goal of meeting application deadlines in much the same way, engaging in this activity to the exclusion of all others.

Henry's ability to motivate and push his seniors toward a goal they had all held for three years was intentional. They had laid the groundwork in the first three years and it was now time for the coach and his athletes to see their hard work pay off.

The Facilitator: Preparing Students for Future Learning

Henry often worked as a facilitator, a conduit through which his students began to learn how to apply knowledge from high school to college. He accomplished this with two assignments at the end of the year. The first was the production of a college-level research paper in which he took them through the steps of research, pre-writing, writing, editing, and creating a reference page. The second way in which he prepared them for future learning was their work on a college budget. Both of these assignments prepared them for the academic and life situations they will face as college students.

We meet in the library after spring break and the mood is heavy. Students lay their heads on their desks, many of them with their eyes shut. Spring break has had its usual effect of giving kids a taste of summer and making it difficult for them to focus on school. A few clusters of students are conversing about spring break and it sounds like many of them stayed at home and hung out with friends. I hear lots of, "What did you do?" and, "Nothin' man, just chilled at home." Henry walks into the room energetically. "Welcome back, guys, I hope everyone had a nice break. I did some work over the break and have a research paper ready to

go." Lots of groans and "oh man" comments resonate. Henry responds good-naturedly, "It's not that bad—take advantage of this opportunity to get help. Next year you will be expected to walk through the door knowing how to write a paper of this caliber." He proceeds to hand out a well-defined assignment to the students. He reads aloud, "In this research paper you guys will be picking a significant event that occurred over the last 100 years and how it has affected society." I watch as the students begin to peruse the list of topics and note the faint looks of interest that crosses over their faces.

As the list of possible topics is passed around, students become animated. "Hey, I wanted that one. Mr. Miller, can two people do the same topic?" His response is firm, "No, there are plenty to choose from." The student who asked the question rolls her eyes, sighs, and peruses the topics again. Henry has provided the students with a handout of clear guidelines, information on topic sentences, thesis statements, and explained how-to reference materials. The biggest problem for some seemed to be citations, a roadblock I can identify with. One student approached Henry almost daily, saying, "Mr. Miller, I don't understand this." Each time Henry would take a seat next to the student and explain it. "See, this is an Internet source— I need the exact web address as well as the date you got it from the Internet. The main point of citations is to give your reader the ability to locate the material you used within your paper. It needs to be

clear." His demeanor was understanding, his tone calm. I note his patience in my fieldnotes:

> How can he explain that to the same student over and over again? I would be pulling my hair out, saying, "We have been over this." He is so calm and patient. (Field notes, March 17, 2003)

This student was clearly confused by this process; he crinkled his brow and looked down toward the desk. I watched as he looked at the inside flap of books trying to locate the reference information. This usually ended in him slamming the book shut, shaking his head, and moving to the reference room. For his part, Henry was well aware of the problem and always made himself available to the student, but he did not find the answers for him. Rather, Henry facilitated the ability of the student to find the answers on his own.

Each day in the library Henry greeted his students with a "hello" and they were off—scattering across the library like kindergartners at recess. One cluster hit the computers, others stayed seated to write, and many gathered in the reference room. I hear a few side conversations, but they typically focus on their task. Henry did not get a moment's rest, moving across the room in response to cries of, "Mr. Miller…." He sat next to each student who had a question, looking at them and listening as they speak. This assignment was important to him: "My main motivation was getting them, before they leave, at least one short paper under their belt to evaluate and really get into the topic" (H. Miller, interview,

April 7, 2003). This particular assignment was created by suggestions from former alumni: “They highlighted the things that they didn’t know how to do when they left [Regis], so we basically built assignments around those suggestions” H. Miller (interview, April 7, 2003). The assignment was shaped in hopes that these AVID students would be prepared to research and write a college-level paper on their own next year. Henry eased them through this process by scaffolding instruction, thereby allowing them to be responsible for the final product. His students would enter college in the fall armed with research and writing skills needed to produce a freshmen English research paper.

The seniors ended their year by preparing a budget for college. Henry helped them to break down their expenses into categories and monthly expenditures. These students will not have the luxury of calling home for more money. This project was important to Henry and one that he discussed with me during our initial interview:

> The last project the seniors will do this year is a college budget. They’re going to have to find out some information and prices for what it’s going to cost them: Are they going to need a car? Will they be in downtown Houston or Nacogdoches (and by then they’ll know exactly where they’re going to be). They’re going to have to price every single tiny thing. We will put our brains together and find every single item they may spend money on. It’s going to be a hugely fun and satisfying project. I’d like to

> have all my classes come in and watch them present that. (H. Miller, interview, February 7, 2003)

The process begins with Henry handing out a sheet listing all possible expenditures for the first year in college. The list is exhaustive and spanned two pages, accounting for everything from tuition to health care expenses. Henry pleaded,

> I want you guys to be as realistic as possible with this. Believe me, it will serve you well. I wish I had done this before I went to college. You don't want to be one of those living off of your credit card. Plan ahead. Be sure to include any scholarships and financial aid in this package. What you will need to come away with is an idea of how much cash you will need to meet monthly expenses.

A girl next to me looks at the list, eyes wide, "What—I'm fixin' to take my bedroom apart. My mom better let me take my comforter and my stereo—oooh, this is going to cost a lot!" The students at her table laugh and join in. "I better be getting some financial aid." "It's all right, I got a full ride," Damon says, smiling from ear to ear. "I'll be going to my sister's for dinner every night and save me some money!" another student chimes in. After the initial banter, Henry says, "Okay, I know this looks overwhelming, but let's get going and see what you come up with. It may not be as bad as you think." The reluctant students stare at the list, shaking their heads. "Aww, Mr. Miller," one whines. Finally, they pick up

the laptops Henry has made available to them and begin to research. Throughout this process, many comments are heard intermittently. “What—they expect me to pay that!” “Oh no—I got to have me some money to go out.” “I need a big meal plan, I can’t be skipping any meals, three solids a day for me!” are a few of the comments made.

The day of budget presentations the students come in noisily and begin to load disks into computers to present their information on PowerPoint slides. Henry greets the class with a smile asks, “Is everyone ready?” When there is no answer, he proceeds, “Okay—who would like to go first?” A petite, gregarious girl in back saunters to the front of the room. “Okay ya’ll, here we go.” She animatedly explains the breakdown of her budget, but falters in some of her estimates: “Books will be about $150.” Henry and I laugh out loud and he counters, “I think you may need to look at that one again.” She looks at him, startled as if she did not know that. Henry is clearly paying attention to the information presented as seen in his comments: “Are you sure about that? Did you factor in the financial aid you received last month? Are things really that much cheaper in [name of city]?”

Henry’s questions force the students to grapple with the fiscal realities of being on their own for the first time, once again addressing the transition that is about to occur when the students enter college. Students must consider the costs of college before they get there in order to be prepared. Henry works to ease this

transition from living with one's family to living on one's own by having them prepare realistic budgets.

> The college budget is a wonderful assignment, but I also wonder: What a great assignment—I wish my senior teacher had required something like this. On the other hand, it probably would have stressed me out completely. I wonder if any of Henry's students are feeling like college is an impossible dream after seeing the cost in black and white. Will this assignment help or hinder? (Fieldnotes, May 2003)

I sensed by comments such as, "That can't cost that much," and, "I'll have to do without soap," that students were a bit overwhelmed by the cost of college. Still, the assignment was effective in instilling self-help skills in the students and making them think about expenses prior to incurring them.

Both the writing and the budget assignments required the students to look beyond high school and into their futures as college students, which prepared them for the reality of living on their own. These students are no longer going to be guided by parents and teachers and need to be ready with some practical knowledge for the realities of that freedom. For his part, Henry facilitated their transformation by giving them some tools to take with them.

Henry's roles as a director, coach, and facilitator are unique to his practice and create a room of learners who are ready to move on to the next stage of their education. He directs their activities while allowing for choices within those

activities, he pushes and prods to make sure his students have the opportunity to apply to college, and he has begun to prepare them for the realities of college-level work and living on their own for the first time. Establishing an AVID classroom like this one takes time and continuity. The teacher-student interaction in Henry's classroom is peaceful, harmonious, and productive because of the three years in which they had worked together to get to this point.

AVID LIMITATIONS

My observations in Henry's class allowed me to observe some deficiencies in the AVID program as a whole. His class, and not Kris or Kay's, revealed these because his seniors are at a point where they are making the decision to enroll in the colleges where they have been accepted. I think that in some ways the program is naïve in its assumption that study skills and enrolling in honors courses will adequately prepare students for college. AVID students may be academically prepared, but what about the realities of finances and leaving home? Sixty-six percent of Regis' students are economically disadvantaged, defined as students being eligible for the federal free and reduced-price lunch program or other public assistance (Great Schools, 2004). If no grants, scholarships, or government money is found, these capable students will be unable to attend college. AVID, at least as far as I can tell, does not directly address this issue. Henry attempts to address this by providing as much

information as possible for sources of funding for college. He has lists of websites on the chalkboard for students to view.

Another roadblock in getting all AVID students to attend college is the fact that these students are the first in their families to leave home and go to college. Sometimes,

> The resources that an innovative program such as AVID can muster are limited. Sometimes, they are not sufficient to overcome the constraints imposed by the overwhelming practical circumstances in the lives of AVID students. (Mehan et al., 1996, p. 91)

For example, in the senior AVID classroom where I worked, a student had a baby in March. She returned to school after six weeks and proceeded to complete the work required to graduate. Henry spent a lot of time helping her catch up and continue to work on getting into college. In the end, the reality of parenthood and family responsibilities caused her to decline a four-year university opportunity and opt for community college instead. Henry shared with me, “Katie is very capable and will do well in college.” That may be, but in her case, circumstances got in the way and she did not achieve a stated goal of AVID. This is not to say that her future is doomed; she may very well get through community college and go on to a university. However, the point is that AVID and Henry can only go so far to prepare these students for college.

Lastly, AVID students are somewhat pampered with all of the reminders about deadlines, tutorial support, encouragement from teachers, and choices in assignments. While these are not detrimental practices in high school, they do not exist at many four-year universities. The move from high school to college must be challenging at best when all of this assistance is no longer present.

FINAL THOUGHTS

My last day in Henry's class is spent talking about the year. He comments, "I am mentally and physically exhausted and more than ready for the year to end. I am in desperate need of a break. I was looking forward to a break between spring and summer sessions, but I found out today summer school begins immediately" (H. Miller, personal communication, May 23, 2003).

I ask him about the difference in freshmen and senior AVID classes, to which he responds, "They hate you before they love you and right now Kris and Kay have the difficult job of getting them to this level." By working as a director, coach, and facilitator, Henry enacts an important principle of AVID: "A hallmark of these programs is that they never lose sight of the objective, i.e., enrolling their students in a four-year university. Virtually every activity is tied to college entrance" (AVID training manual, 2003, p. 28).

Henry placed a lot of value on getting his students ready for college-level work as seen in his role as a coach. He understands that for these kids, college is a new idea for them and their families, unlike in his own family: "When I was

growing up, I never had any idea about how the world would break down for me. I understood going to school beyond high school was just what happened" (H. Miller, interview, February 7, 2003). Henry became that person who had this expectation of his students; college was a given for each of them in his mind and he made explicit statements about this belief, oftentimes beginning sentences with "Next year, when you are at a university…." I believe each of his seniors will succeed in college next year for many reasons, but mostly because Henry was able to move from teacher to facilitator in their senior year, allowing them to dictate their own learning and be responsible for meeting deadlines and due dates. He reminded them repeatedly, but the ultimate responsibility to get the work done, find the money, and attend college is up to them.

Henry's relaxed approach to teaching creates independent and peaceful learners. His classroom is a domain where students can focus on the things most important to them. The senior AVID students need a teacher who is able to lead them toward independence. This relationship occurs when teacher and students have developed a relationship over an extended period of time. Henry is familiar with each of his students at more than a surface level because of contact on a daily basis over a period of years. Because of this, he can trust them to take care of their own business and allow freedom in instruction. He is not bound by pedagogy specific to AVID at this point; instead, the students govern their own activities depending upon what they need to accomplish each day.

Most activities I observed were geared toward getting students admitted to college. AVID students in their senior year are solely focused on this one objective. As I leave the room for the last time, I glance at the college acceptance board that greeted me on that first day and note how it has grown. I have witnessed how this board emphasizes the AVID principle that "success breeds more success, and AVID's visible, data-driven success has helped foster a culture of academic excellence, high expectations, and going to college within schools" (*Shaping the American Dream*, 2003, p. 36).

CHAPTER SEVEN

Kay Stewart: The Rookie

Kay stands all of 5'1" and weighs probably 100 pounds at most. Her small stature should not be mistaken for weakness or timidity as she is an avid runner and has completed two marathons, including the famous Boston Marathon. The kids do not mistake her for a student nor do they disrespect her because of her size and youthful appearance. She has curly shoulder length hair, olive skin and enormous brown eyes. She is Mexican American and speaks Spanish, albeit broken by her own admission. She dresses a lot like her students, often wearing jeans and trendy shirts. She routinely greets her class with a huge smile and an enthusiastic demeanor.

Kay is the youngest of four girls from Phoenix, Arizona and is very close to her family. Her call to teaching stems from her mom's occupation as a kindergarten teacher, her dad's insistence that all of his daughters attend college, and her experience tutoring kids in college. She is a third-year math teacher and first year AVID teacher. I inquired as to whether teaching at Regis was a choice or a mandate from the district.

> I actually ended up at Regis because they were the first place to call and interview. But I also… I wanted to work in a school very similar to Regis. I wanted to work with students that were more disadvantaged and I turned

> in an application to the district and in the application made it very clear in a lot of the questions that I answered I wanted to be where I was most needed and I also spoke Spanish, not perfectly, but I speak Spanish and wanted to be somewhere that I'd be able to use that. (K. Stewart, interview, April 7, 2003)

Kay volunteered to teach AVID because she wanted to help kids navigate their way through high school and attend college. Growing up, she saw "a lot of my friends involved in similar programs and they were pretty effective…they can help those students who maybe need that" (K. Stewart, interview, April, 7, 2003). She is in her rookie year as an AVID teacher and approached the program from the perspective of one who has seen, firsthand, the benefits of programs that work to serve underrepresented populations.

Her interest in the population that makes up Regis stems from her own upbringing in Arizona and the differences she observed in families within her neighborhood:

> I grew up in Phoenix in a neighborhood that was very Mexican, Mexican American working-class type neighborhood. Both my parents were educated.… I grew up in a household where education was valued, very, very valued, but at the same time I saw a lot of people around me who didn't have... whose lives were very different from mine. Like I had friends that were involved in gangs, I had friends that were shot and killed,

> and I just wanted to come back… I enjoy working with this population. (K. Stewart, interview, April 7, 2003)

Kay's background qualifies her to understand the life circumstances of many of her students. She specifically chose Regis and AVID to make a positive difference in the academic lives of her students.

Kay values her position as an AVID teacher as it fulfills her desire to work with motivated kids and to help students see beyond high school and plan for their future.

> I'm the youngest of four children and we've all gone to college and graduated—that was my parents' primary goal with us—but then I saw some of my friends who were just as capable who didn't end up going because of other things that come in and get in the way. I saw a lot of programs that can be pretty effective and they can help those students who maybe need that, but who aren't… not that they're not getting support from home, but sometimes its hard as a parent if you haven't gone to college, it's hard to show students what they need to do. (K. Stewart, interview, April 7, 2003)

Kay realizes the road to college is a difficult one and her knowledge of how to get there is valuable to her AVID students. In addition, she chose this position as a means to encounter motivated kids willing to do the work required to get to the next level in their education:

> Part of it was just to kind of selfish, like... this is my third year teaching and my first and second year I didn't have any honors classes and I'm teaching ninth grade (not necessarily ninth graders, there's tenth and eleventh graders who haven't passed yet). So I was working with some algebra kids who were pretty far behind. I think as a teacher I needed… it's good to be around a group of kids who want to be successful. Not because other kids didn't, but they obviously had more things getting in their way. It's nice to be around students who know they are going to go to college and are driven for whatever reason, so its good as a teacher to be around that. And also AVID is a pretty structured and organized program and I work well with structure and organization. (K. Stewart, interview, April 7, 2003)

Her desire to work with kids who are motivated to learn and who plan to attend college stems from her family background and her desire to eliminate "things getting in the way" of their success.

Yet, I question her motivation – why does she want to teach only the top students at Regis? Has she dismissed the other students as those who are unable or unwilling to succeed in school? Her comments allude to deficit models of thinking about students of color. She attributes their lack of success to "things getting in the way," blaming student circumstances on school failure versus examining her own practice. Her way of avoiding this examination appears to be

to teach a certain type of student, one who supposedly cares about school and will be motivated to work hard and achieve success.

CLASSROOM FEATURES

Kay's classroom has a lot of blank space on the walls and the desks are arranged in six rows facing the front of the room. The bulletin boards are covered with bright yellow or red butcher paper and a corresponding red or yellow border. The front board next to the door holds pictures, notes given to her by students, and certificates and appreciation notes she has received from parents and administrators. Her sidewalls hold student work, examples of math projects, and AVID projects. Most of the student work is on poster board and has the penmanship associated with freshmen and sophomore students: a little messy, but colorful and creative. The front of the room has huge a chalkboard that is often blank during AVID instruction. When Kay needs to write she uses the overhead projector rather than the board. In front of this board are a few small desks used to hold papers, lesson plans and transparencies. In addition, Kay has a vertical file filled with items for her AVID class—announcements, notepaper, and supplies.

In the front right corner is a small rectangular window surrounded by her file cabinet and a bookshelf full of textbooks. Moving toward the back of the room, one sees a large air conditioning unit akin to an old-fashioned window unit. Kay places a dry-erase board on top of it with the weekly schedule written on it. Her desk is in the back of the room at an angle and is lined with papers, a

computer, reference books, staplers, hole punch machines, and other teacher paraphernalia. Behind the desk is a large bulletin board, which holds 8x10 announcements given to her by the administration. The back wall is lined with four computers, often occupied by students both before and after class. The students appear comfortable in their rows of desks and Kay tends to speak standing at the front of the room. There is a lot of open space in this classroom.

HER STUDENTS

The AVID students occupy 19 of the 30 desks available; there are 10 Hispanic, 7 African American, and 2 White students. Fifteen of these are females, leaving only four males in the room. They are dressed in typical teenager attire: jeans, athletic gear and tennis shoes. They have the look of adolescents on the brink of adulthood—not children, but not yet adults. Kay's and Kris's students are very similar in size and style. An observer would not have been able to discern a difference in these two classes in terms of what the students looked like; the differences were in their demeanors and in the relationship they shared with their teacher.

THEMES

The remainder of this chapter must be qualified in one major way. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, I was unable to observe in Kay's classroom more than once a week. As a result, the amount of data I have on her is

significantly less than what I gathered on the other two participants. Kay's practice revealed the same five themes of caring, high expectations, student responsibility, flexibility, and voluntary participation but I did not get the opportunity to see them as vividly as in the other AVID classrooms due to scheduling matters beyond my control. Despite this shortcoming, I will show as richly as possible what I was able to see and how Kay enacted the themes of caring, high expectations, flexibility, student responsibility, and voluntary participation in her classroom of freshmen AVID students.

Caring

Kay's admitted desire is to teach motivated kids and kids who might otherwise slip through the cracks succeed in high school and get into college. Her personal background has allowed her to see the experiences of those who do not have a program like AVID to help them in school. As previously discussed, many of her childhood classmates did not go on to college, not because they were any less talented than she, but because they lacked the encouragement and support from home and school. Her entrance into AVID is based on concern and caring for those students who tend to get lost within the current school system. "These programs can be pretty effective in helping students who need it and who may not be getting the support from home" (K. Stewart, interview, April 7, 2003).

Kay demonstrated caring in her ability to sacrifice personal time to help her students. More than once, I witnessed a student lingering after the bell rang to

ask her a question. “Ms. Stewart, can you look at this paper for me?” Kay always responded warmly: “Sure, let’s see what it looks like.” She would then proceed to sit down and read the work, despite the fact that she only had five minutes until her next class arrived. It was common for me to enter the room and see five to six students hovering around her desk.

An example of her habit of making extra time for her students occurred during a writing assignment. This assignment, though made clear with written guidelines, was difficult for many of her students. Kay took the time to explain the assignment repeatedly in a patient tone. She offered on more than a few occasions, “If you want to work on these during class we can. That way I can conference with those of you that want some individual help in improving your writing.” Her students eagerly took her up on this offer, some writing while others take their turns at her desk. One student, a Hispanic boy, approaches her good-naturedly and sits down backwards in a desk facing her, “Ms. Stewart, I need help. I’ve even been going to tutoring after school and I don’t get it.” I overhear Kay say, “ Lets see what you’ve got, Oscar.” A pause ensues while she reads his draft. “You might want to outline the main points with the supporting evidence underneath. This way, your writing is organized and you make sure you say all that you want to say.” Oscar looks up at her blankly, adjusts his glasses, and begins to write on a blank piece of paper. She waits patiently for him, sitting directly in front of him, their desks facing each other. He hesitantly hands her the

paper he has been writing on for at least 15 minutes. Kay responds loudly and enthusiastically, “Awesome, that’s exactly what I was talking about. Now try and sit down and elaborate on your ideas in your paper.” She spent this kind of time with each student who needed her assistance, which I assume took away time from other activities she wanted to pursue. She allowed it because she is a caring teacher wants to help them produce their best work.

Her caring was also exemplified in her sacrifice of personal time beyond the school day. There were many instances in which she stated, “I am available both before and after school if you need any help.” Kay made a habit of keeping extra hours for her students, arriving early and staying at least an hour past the bell.

High Expectations

High expectations are implicit in the AVID curriculum and teachers who choose to teach in the AVID program have to believe in the ability of their students to excel in academics. Kay chose to be a part of AVID because of the type of student she believed she would encounter. “It’s nice to be around a group of high-achieving students who want to be successful and go to college” (K. Stewart, interview, April 7, 2003). Her expectations are made clear as assignments are made and again after she grades them, particularly if the students fail to meet her requirements. An example of her disappointment in their failure to meet stated expectations occurred after an exceptionally bad tutorial session.

Tutorials days are an integral part of the AVID program. In a study done on AVID, all the teachers in the program admitted that tutors were essential in making AVID work (AVID *Shaping the American Dream*, 2003). Kay realizes the importance of making good use of tutorials and stresses this fact to her students continually: “Be ready for tutorials—this is your chance to receive help with problems you are having.” Her expectation is that kids will come prepared with useful questions designed to help them in their academic classes. During her absence on a tutorial day, the students failed to use their tutorial session wisely and Kay made a point to comment on it the following day.

The next day, the students enter the room and move lazily toward their seats, finishing conversations and dragging their backpacks across desks. The mood is somber as if they knew a lecture was eminent. The sound of repeated thumping is heard as they walk down the aisles. As they slowly settle into their desks, Kay is standing at the front waiting with her arms crossed and her usual smile noticeably absent. She pauses as they settle in and says, “Okay guys, I know about tutorials when I was out on Thursday.” The students look at her blankly and glance at one another. “I know that most of you came to tutorials without questions and were not allowed into the room until you had questions. [The substitute] told me that over half of you were in the hallway.” Kay’s tone is not loud or harsh, just matter of fact, wanting them to own up to what happened. She continues to stand at the front of the room, making eye contact with each of her

students. The students slouch in their chairs, looking at her, but not responding. Kay continues:

> Tutorials are not an invitation to do homework, but to bring real questions which you can work on with your peers and [college] tutors—it is not individual work time. You guys are lucky to have this opportunity for tutorials.

The students are stubborn in their refusal to respond to her, but they also do not deny her allegations. They look toward the floor or their desks as Kay stands at the front, hands on hips, waiting for an explanation. It becomes clear that no one is going to comment and so she proceeds to address the issue more directly.

Kay sighs and says, “Okay, let’s work on this together. Please take a copy of this chart and pass it back.” She proceeds to the right side of the room and hands a stack of papers to the student sitting at the front of each row. The sound of papers rustling and crinkling is heard as students pass papers back. Kay clicks on her overhead and a copy of Bloom’s taxonomy is on the overhead. She asks for a sample subject and a student offers “English.” “Okay—so write an example of a possible tutorial question about the writing process.” Various students offer questions and Kay assigns these questions to levels on the taxonomy. “You see, your goal is to ask questions at the highest level possible.” Her instructions remind me of the tutorial training I received at the AVID institute where this idea was accentuated. The trainers made sure we knew that students should be coming

up with more than yes or no questions during tutorials. They should be asking things that help them delve deeper into their topics.

Most students are participating and offering ideas for discussion. Kay calls on the less verbal students individually: " Donald, what do you think?" "Liza, what could be another way to pose that question?" She asks the questions quickly and points with her overhead marker. The end result is a reiteration of the purpose and format of tutorials. Toward the end of class, Kay quiets them down and says, "My goal for AVID is to make tutorials better for you, but in turn you need to be responsible to bring good questions." She reiterated her expectations and provided a means to meet them for the next tutorial session.

Another illustration of her high expectations occured on the day a major writing project is due. In this instance, her demeanor is not so calm when her students fail to meet her expectations. Unlike in the previous example in which the students had failed to take an advantage of a single opportunity, this involved a project that they had five weeks to complete. Kay had spent a lot of personal time on this assignment, allowing class time and communicating with parents about due dates. Her goal was to have every student turn in a quality product on time, something they had been struggling with all year (K. Stewart, personal communication, April 7, 2003).

On the day the papers are due, the students come in quietly and sit in their rows dejectedly. There is a feeling in the room that can only be described as

heavy. Faces are long and people look tired. Immediately after the bell rings, Kay shuts the door and comes to the front of the room. “Okay, D-day, everyone pass your papers to the front of the room.” Her voice is light and her face warmed by a smile. She eagerly waits at the front of each row for students to hand up papers, anticipating as all teachers do, the stellar work her students are about to turn in. As she proceeds across the row, her smile fades and her expression changes from excited anticipation to disappointment. Ultimately, she is holding only eight papers. She stands at the front with a look of shock on her face; her smile and enthusiasm have disappeared. “Are you serious, is this all?” Her mouth hangs open in disbelief. A pause follows that feels like hours, the students are strangely silent, and Kay is staring at them with a look of disgust on her face.

Kay walks quickly to the hallway, walks out of the room, and shuts the door. The students looked stunned and unsure of what to do, but before any action can be taken, she returns, slams the door and proceeds to vent. Her face is overshadowed by anger her voice level has escalated to a yell. “Those of you that decided to not turn in your work, go to the computer lab right now and get to work. Never, never in my three years of teaching have I been so angry—never!” She is pacing at the front of the room, her olive skin turning red. She intermittently looks up at them in disbelief. The students adopt an obstinate demeanor, slouching in their chairs and looking at each other and smirking. Kay sees this and it only serves to anger her further. She yells, “Get out!” More than

half the class gets up, grumbling under their breath, takes their bags and noisily leave the room.

After they leave, Kay waits for a while takes a deep breath and allows herself time to regain her composure. She says to the seven remaining students, "I'm not mad at you guys—thank you for having your work in—please take out your SAT words, we will review that today." As she passes out SAT preparation materials, her hands tremble and her breath is labored. Her voice is low when she begins, "Okay, what we are going to do with this is to review…." I miss the rest of the instructions to go and locate my tape recorder. When I return, the students she had dismissed to the lab have returned. They are loud and disruptive, asking questions to interrupt the lesson, clearly angry at having been yelled at by Kay. Kay's demeanor is fairly unpleasant as well. She responds with an angry "no" when a student asks her to repeat an answer. Thankfully, the bell rings and the students quickly leave the room.

Kay turns to me, looking dejected and as if she might cry and says, "I am so frustrated with this class. They had five weeks to write this paper. I sent home written requirements and deadlines that their parents signed—how much clearer can I be?" Their failure to meet her expectations clearly upsets and frustrates Kay. She continues, "I am so frustrated because I expect more out of my AVID kids than my other classes" (K. Stewart, personal communication, April 7, 2003). Her behavior in this instance was not consistent with the calm way in which she

handled the tutorial situation; however, her expectations for her students are consistent with her desire to see them succeed in AVID.

Kay does not place all of the blame on her students when they fail to meet expectations:

> I have a bad habit of saying something's due and then kids not doing it and then I'll give them a second or third chance sometimes. I'm trying really hard not to do that because in the long run it's damaging to the kids and more stressful for me. (K. Stewart, interview, April7, 2003)

Her high expectations apply to herself as well as to her students; she is cognizant of the fact that they will not meet deadlines if she does not enforce them. She attempts to remedy this situation by focusing on student responsibility.

Student Responsibility

Despite her admitted habit of taking late work and not enforcing deadlines, Kay attempts to adhere to the more global goal of enforcing AVID program policies. Every six weeks, students' grades are reviewed and those who are not passing or have too many absences are placed on academic probation. Kay enters class today with a stack of papers and passes them down each aisle as she talks,

> Okay guys, it is time to pass out contracts for AVID. Many of you will not be surprised to discover that you have probation for this six weeks. What this means is that you must attend tutorial hours either before or after school and improve your grades the next six weeks in order to get off

> probation. It is up to you to get this done. In addition, if you do not get the required signatures during your tutorial sessions, it will not count. Let me remind you that we are in the process of interviewing for next year's AVID class; make an effort or you may not be here next year.

There is little reaction to her proclamation as the students hand the contracts down the rows and write their names on the top. One student inquires, "Miss, what if I can't come?" Kay makes eye contact with him while continuing to hand out papers. "Find a way. I can be flexible with hours or you can go to the gear-up lab, but it must be done until your grades improve. This is part of the AVID program. You must meet minimum standards." He shakes his head and stuffs the contract into the back of his folder.

Atthe end of each week, Kay circulates around to verify tutorial hours. One student in the corner whines, "Miss, I forgot to get them to sign it, but I was there." Kay looks at him intently. "I told you up front you have to have signatures—either get them to sign it now or you do not get credit and will have to double your hours next week." He responds, rising from his desk and moving toward the door, "Aww man! Can I go to the tutor lab right now and see if they will sign it?" She responds impatiently, "Yes, but hurry." The probation requirements are that students attend a specific number of tutorial hours on their own time until their grades improve. This action places the responsibility to improve upon the student; the teacher's job is to provide opportunities to fulfill

their time requirements. In addition, the students are in charge of keeping a log of their tutorial time and turning this log into the AVID teacher.

This scene demonstrated a contradiction in Kay's practice, as the purpose of contracts is to teach personal responsibility, yet she allowed a second chance to secure the required signatures. This discord mirrors the one in Kris's practice; Kay wants her students to succeed so sometimes allows additional chances that undermine her attempt to teach personal responsibility. In this instance, the student had attended tutorial hours, but had forgotten to get his contract signed. Does a teacher fail him to teach him a lesson or allow a second chance so that he can be successful? Kris and Kay have the difficult job of wanting to keep qualified kids in the program, yet having to make them learn to take responsibility for their own work. They work tirelessly to balance the tension between these two elements of AVID.

Personal responsibility was included in the process of reviewing AVID candidates for the following school year. Kay shared with me that she will

> Sit down and look at some of our kids and whether or not they really need to be in AVID next year. There're definitely students in here that aren't meeting AVID standards, and they're not meeting them by a lot.… There's probably a better place for those students and there's a lot of students who want into AVID that should be placed in AVID. (K. Stewart, interview, April 7, 2003)

Kay desires that each of her students do well but is realistic enough to know that for students who do not want to do what it takes to succeed, her desire will not be sufficient. There are numerous students at Regis waiting to gain access to the AVID program. She does not see the point of providing multiple chances to no avail if it keeps another potential AVID student out of the program. We discussed this issue one day as the students were working. Kay discreetly points to a student in the corner of the room, one who is absent much of the time and spends a lot of class time eating and talking with others:

> Like Amy over there—I am more than frustrated with her. She misses class half the time and turns in nothing, not just in my class, but all of her classes. My feeling is that she is lazy because I know she's capable and she keeps telling me that she wants to stay in AVID, but I am not so sure she will be here next year. (K. Stewart, personal communication, March 3, 2003)

In the case of this student, her desire to remain in the program is not going to be enough to keep her there. Kay's comment that the student is just lazy causes alarm bells to go off in my head. Again, her words point out a belief in a deficit mode of thinking. She has attributed the student's lack of success to laziness, an internal attribute of the student. I feel her comment showed a lack of an ability to "… accept students but also take the responsibility to teach them" (Delpit, 1995, p. 38). She dismisses the student as lazy rather than examining her own practice

or some other external reason for an answer to the reason that the student is not doing well academically.

Flexibility

Kay is flexible in terms of offering choices to her students, changing a deadline if absolutely necessary, and making changes in her curriculum in response to the needs of her students. Fridays in AVID are designated guest-speaker days, but for whatever reason, guest speakers were rare at Regis and in Kay's classroom she frequently gave her students a choice as to how to spend that time. On Wednesdays, she would often enter the room and ask, "On Friday, do you guys want to go the computer lab and continue our research or have a Philosophical Chairs or Socratic Seminar discussion?" The answers would vary depending upon the mood of the class that week or how much work they needed to do on pending projects. Her flexibility allowed for students to feel a sense of ownership over their schedule, while still adhering to AVID curriculum.

Kay's flexibility was illustrated best the week of the tragedy at Regis High School. She had plans for the week and a curriculum she needed to teach, but she had enough sensitivity to realize that her students were not up for it; they needed something else from her: " I shortened lessons throughout the week and I didn't give as much homework as I usually do… academics was definitely on the backburner" (K. Stewart, personal communication, April 9, 2003). There is so

much to cover over the course of the year, but Kay placed the needs of her students over curriculum requirements.

Another example in which Kay's flexibility was demonstrated concerned a deadline for a major project. This project was discussed previously, within the high expectations section of this writing, where fewer than half the class turned in a paper. Her flexibility in this instance contradicted her statement about wanting to stop the practice of providing second and third chances. Despite this, the next time the subject of the papers is broached, Kay has amended her original position:

> I am going to accept all of your papers and grade them, not as late, but turned in on time. I realized after thinking about it that it really wasn't fair to you to suddenly drop firm deadlines when I hadn't done it all year. I also know that my not being an English teacher probably hurt you guys. I could not help you with the writing process as much as I should. So, if you have your papers, I will take them now.

Kay makes this proclamation while not making eye contact and looking rather uncomfortable. I cannot help but wonder what led her to this course of action, especially considering the way she has been so self-critical about her inability to be consistent in enforcing deadlines. Rather than thank her, most students question her actions. "Why would you do that, Miss? How can we all get a second chance?" She pauses, then responds in a muted tone, "My goal is to get you to a level where you can get work turned in on time, but I realized that I have

taken late work all year and it probably was unrealistic to think that you guys could suddenly drop that practice." Again, no shows of appreciation, just a lot of eye-rolling and smiles. For those who turned in their work on time, she thanks them, but no incentive is given to do it again. Later, I inquire about her drastic change in regard to this project and learn that her actions are a result of parent and colleague pressure,

> Parents and another AVID teacher came to me asking me to accept the papers late because I always have and because the assignment coincided with another writing assignment in their English class. When given the choice between a zero in AVID and a zero in English, the students chose AVID. (K. Stewart, personal communication, April 16, 2003)

Kay felt responsible somehow, like she should have known, yet I could not help wondering why this English teacher, who also teaches AVID, did not come to her privately and ask her to move her assignment. All this had resulted in was open conflict in the classroom and the failure of Kay to be successful at enforcing a deadline, something I knew was important to her. "High standards in high school, especially for ninth graders, is making them realize when something is due, it's due. I was just trying to do that" (K. Stewart, interview, April 7, 2003).

Her high expectations conflict with her desire to be fair and flexible with her students, a dichotomy that was consistently present. High expectations, student responsibility, and flexibility were all intertwined within Kay's practice.

She desperately wanted her students to excel, but when they did not she was often flexible and allowed additional chances for them to succeed. This habit contradicted her goal of having them be responsible for both successes and failures. As a result, students often did not know what to expect from Kay, although I do believe they knew that deadlines would not be enforced. Kay was aware of this weakness in her practice, but her efforts to be stringent with deadlines were outweighed by her desire to see her students succeed.

Voluntary Participation

Kay felt strongly about her kids being in the program on their own accord, to the point where she opted to keep kids in AVID who were not meeting AVID standards if they truly wanted to be in the class and were giving their best effort. "There are some students who aren't meeting AVID standards and who might always fall a little short of them, but they're trying hard and want to be here, so of course, I want those kids" (K. Stewart, interview, April 4, 2003). She extended this idea to parents as well, noting,

> Sometimes a parent has come and asked that their child be placed in AVID. If they qualify, we are willing to do that. Usually that student enters with some reservations, but usually comes around when they discover what AVID can do for them. (K. Stewart, interview, April 4, 2003)

This comment differs from her one within the personal responsibility section in which she stated that students who are not meeting standards should be placed out of AVID. There is a difference between a student giving his or her best and being unable to meet requirements and a student who fails to do so due to a conscious choice. For Kay, the desire to be in AVID and give 100% effort is worth giving the student another year to improve his or her performance.

Kay's commitment to voluntary participation by AVID students leads to her frustration in the previously discussed writing assignment. As we talk later, she laments, " I lost it because they volunteered to be in AVID and I don't understand why they often don't meet the standards of the program" (K. Stewart, personal communication, April 7, 2003). She has volunteered to participate and does the extra work required of her, and is understandably disappointed when they do not do the same.

KAY'S PEDAGOGY

Several key ideas emerge in regard to the pedagogy employed in this AVID classroom. Kay's practice is distinguished by her ability to nourish student discussion and to allow for student input within her classroom. These two identifiers make her classroom an active one: students are typically seen talking and interacting with one another versus sitting and listening to her talk. Her propensity for opening the class to student input demonstrates the flexibility and laid-back manner with which she approaches teaching and helped lead her

students toward a part of the mission of AVID, which states that learners "will become educated and responsible participants and leaders in a democratic society." These two elements do not give full attention to all that Kay does in the classroom, but do provide a window to her unique approach to implementing the AVID program in a freshmen level classroom.

Student Discussion

AVID has student discussion opportunities built into the curriculum with two formats: Philosophical Chairs and Socratic Seminar. Kay was more inclined to use Philosophical Chairs in her room and thus it will be the focus of the following section.

Philosophical Chairs is used in AVID, but is not unique to the program, as many schools use it nationwide. It is a means to allow students

> …intensive practice in weighing the supporting and opposing arguments in a discussion. They develop sensitivity to their own and others opinions. The point of the exercise is not to arrive at a decision, but to reach a clearer understanding of what might constitute a decision on a particular issue. (Hamilton, 2003, p. 2)

The format is to have three rows of desks, two long and one short. The longer rows are designated affirmative and negative sides with the inside row reserved for students who are undecided on an issue. Students are free to change rows as the discussion progresses and they reconsider their opinions. The "aim of the

exercise is to modify one's opinion under the influence of the discussion rather than to firmly maintain one's beliefs" (Hamilton, 2003, p. 2). AVID is set up to have guest speakers on Fridays, but often this does not occur and so Kay offers opportunities for students to engage in Philosophical Chairs. The format allows students to practice speaking and listening and demonstrate their knowledge of current events.

My first experience observing this type of discussion occurs early in my work and although the topic is not particularly philosophical, it is appropriate for demonstrating the format of Philosophical Chairs and for teaching new students how it works in Kay's classroom. The topic is light enough for everyone to feel at ease in making a contribution to the discussion. I enter the room in late February to find students clustered in two rows against the wall, slouching over their desks, coats and backpacks still on. One student looks particularly forlorn, face turned down, posture slouched. The students look as if they may not be staying long, no one makes a move to sit or remove bags from their shoulders.

Kay enters and stands to the side of the room, directly in front of the students. She stands before them, smiling, pauses and says, "Okay—today we are going to get things going with a discussion." A sly smile crosses over her face. Her voice level rises, " If you had the choice between being a feather and a rock, what would you be?" The question is met with blank stares typical of high school students. "Come on," she says loud and enthusiastically, "those that want to be

feathers get up and move to the right side of the room, the rest of you stay here." Lethargically, the students move, looking bemused as they do. Backpacks are finally removed and slammed onto tables, and students walk across the room, winter jackets crinkling with each step. "Okay, who wants to start us off?" Kay asks, sitting on a desk at the front of the room. A long pause follows until finally a courageous female student replies, "I would be a feather because I'm soft." Lots of chuckles are heard at this comment and as boy in the back of the room calls out, "Whatever…."A female student from the left side calls out, "I am a rock because I stand firm in my beliefs. I don't falter like a feather." As they speak and begin to engage in debate, Kay smiles and encourages them with "What do you mean by that?—explain that more thoroughly—how does that relate to what Sonya just said?"

Kay serves as the mediator and analyst, questioning, commenting, and getting reluctant students to talk. The students soon lose themselves in the activity, growing louder and more assertive as the discussion progresses. Many students change their minds during the discussion, moving from one side to the other and serving to energize the mood of the class. Later, Kay explains to me the reason behind her routine use of Philosophical Chairs: "I like to get them up moving and thinking, particularly on a day like today where their body language reveals that they are tired. For me to lecture today would be pointless; they need to move and think" (K. Stewart, personal communication, February 19, 2003).

This first Philosophical Chairs discussion of the semester is a springboard for one that is more noteworthy and personally involved the Regis community.

The second time I observe Philosophical Chairs, it is a direct response to some negative press Regis receives in the local paper. Kay uses the information as a springboard for discussion, “Okay: The question is, can every student at Regis succeed? If you agree, move to the right, disagree, to the left. Move, move!” She claps her hands and gestures for the students to move. The students appear interested in the question as seen in their quick movement from their desks to various places in the room. The majority sits on the negative side, atop desks. They have definite opinions on the topic as sounds of simultaneous comments are heard and Kay has to intervene. “Guys, guys, hold on. We need some order here.” Kay says this loudly with a huge smile across her face, clearly glad to have gotten her students so animated. “All right, your divisions are unclear. Lets have those that agree come over to this side of the room,” she points to the right, “and those that disagree come to the other side.” Students quickly flurry to one side or the other, talking as they move. Interestingly, there are no students sitting in the middle row reserved for those who are undecided on an issue.

The sight of hands that shoot up and wave around is staggering; everyone seems to have something to say. Kay surveys the room. “Hmmmm… how about Andrew.” Andrew, a quiet Hispanic boy who looks young for his age, adjusts his glasses and almost shouts his response: “We have support from AVID and so

school is a little bit easier for us than others. We have tutors and teachers who help us; not every student has the help." Murmurs of agreement are heard throughout the room. Kay calls on a student from the other side of the room to counter this statement. "Most students can succeed, they have the ability, but sometimes things get in the way." Kay prods them, "Like what?" Her students' call out, "Family, work, money problems, babies." The tone of the conversation strengthens; a few students rise from their seats as they speak. A tall student with straight, long brown hair sitting in the front of the room comments, "Ms. Stewart did not just run a marathon one day. She practiced for it. That is what AVID helps us to do." Kay bursts into a smile, realizing the connection made to her running, an activity she discusses with her students frequently.

In concluding this enlightening discussion, Kay prods them to think about the differences between themselves and the regular student population. "You guys have things some other kids may not have—confidence in yourself and support from your parents—otherwise you would not be here." As class concludes, Kay quickly comments as they file out of the room, "Thanks for a great day, guys. Tomorrow we will get back to our papers." Groans resonate from the hallway. She looks at me and smiles knowingly. "It may be hard to get them back on track after that digression, but I felt it was important to address" (K. Stewart, personal communication, April 25, 2003). The open forum for discussion has opened up the doors for seeing into the expectations the students hold for themselves as well

as revealing the high expectations Kay holds for her students. The frequent discussions allowed in this classroom provide a natural forum for students to voice their opinions in regards to assignments and class protocol.

Kay's practice of providing space for student discussion is effective in building a classroom where students felt safe to explore opinions and ideas. I learned a lot about the practice of Philosophical Chairs in her classroom as both she and her students are masters of this format. Kay uses student discussion as a means to get her students to think about themselves, the world, and their place in it, a stated goal of the AVID program. As a result, a gregarious group of students are nurtured and feel comfortable speaking in front of their peers. This ability moves the students toward effective use of inquiry as a tool for learning. In learning how to formulate ideas and questions they

> formulate their own questions at these various levels, [learn] to ask them respectfully, and to probe for the thinking behind the answers they receive. AVID students learn to question deeply, taking responsibility for developing personal understanding. (*Shaping the American Dream*, 2003, p. 50)

The discussions I observed were enlightening, informative, and taught students to listen to other people's points of view in a respectful manner. The comfort students feel in class discussions leads to their ease in negotiating class procedures and guidelines.

Student Input

Student input, as defined within this writing, refers to Kay's tendency to let students have input into assignments and due dates. Her class felt very different than the other ninth-grade class I observed because the top-down authority structure was absent. Yet, it was also different than the senior classroom where students were working on independent projects. Kay provides specific assignments and a loose structure but allows her students to amend certain parts.

For example, when discussing how to make tutorial sessions more effective, a student suggests, "Why don't we have class time the day before tutorial days to make questions and you could proof them before tutorials?" Many of the students show agreement with this idea in the form of nodding heads and murmurs of "yeah" that resonate throughout the room. Kay smiles quizzically and surveys the room with her eyes. "What do the rest of you think of this? Should we do it?" The students enthusiastically call out, "Yes!" Kay calls out loudly, "Wait, wait, please can I have a show of hands for those who think this is a good idea?" All the students' hands shoot up quickly in response to her question. She looks to me, almost laughing. "Okay, we'll try it, but it better result in better questions being brought to tutorials." Her students look around at one another, victorious in their quest to change protocol. Kay's habit of allowing them to have input is abused in this example; all the students have done is succeeded in gaining to time to work on questions that students in other AVID classes are supposed to

complete as homework. There were times, I felt, that students took advantage of Kay's desire to allow their input, often stalling class or suggesting things that resulted in less work for them.

An additional example of student input occurs on the day the aforementioned papers are due and no one turns them in. After class, a tearful male student approaches Kay. He is a polite, soft-spoken boy who typically wears khakis and collared knit shirts. He is always friendly and was the student who found me in the hallway on my first day and led me to Kay's classroom. Today, he is not smiling and looks as if he may cry. "Ms. Stewart, I tried to do the paper, but I didn't understand it and I had another paper due in English—you can ask the tutors, I was there everyday." His voice trembles and he bites his lip, trying not to cry. Kay stands directly in front of him and looks into his eyes and firmly states, "I am sorry, Rudy. I cannot make an exception for just you. I wish you had come to me and told me you were having problems with the assignment." Rudy's eyes well up some more. "I did, Miss, remember that day last week… you didn't listen to me." At this comment, Kay has had it for the day—between the class not turning in the assignment and this student trying to blame her for his failure to get the work done, she loses her temper once more. "I said no—it is too late to ask for this now!" Her voice is raised and her breath labored. The student persists, " I tried, Miss. You didn't listen." Kay begins to gather her belongings for lunch,

moving him toward the doorway. When he realizes that she is not going to budge, he retreats slowly into the hallway and leaves.

Kay's students had learned that sometimes they are able to sway her assignments and deadlines by talking to her about it, and thus this student felt comfortable attempting to do that. I think her inability to be flexible this time was largely due to the timing of the request. The student came to her the same day as she had yelled at the class for not having their work turned in. Kay was still upset and not in a position to respond to his request in a way he would have liked.

Kay's propensity for respecting student input is commendable but sometimes a bit distracting because of a few students' choice to take advantage of this practice. There were three students in particular who constantly questioned assignments and due dates. Their constant suggestions such as, "How about doing it this way, Ms. Stewart" or, "It would be better if we did it this way" were tiresome, at least to me. Kay never shut them down but allowed space for them to suggest changes and listened to their ideas. She typically responded with, "Well, that could work" or, "No, this is how it needs to be per AVID curriculum." The final exam assignment was the only time that I saw these particular students listen silently to the requirements and not offer addendums; either they were too tired to do so or thought the assignment was acceptable. This open forum for student input was extremely beneficial for students who chose to exercise their voice, but I am not sure how it affected those that remained silent. It was almost as if these

three vocal students became coteachers with Kay, and yet they did not appear to be appreciative of her choice to allow it.

In observing her tendency to allow student input, the question now becomes: how are her students learning personal responsibility when her efforts are inconsistent? I will say that the inconsistency resulted in a class that did not have the rapport and sense of community akin to the two other AVID classes. This is not to say that Kay's actions directly caused this environment to be born, but it seemed like the students never knew what to expect and did not take the idea of deadlines seriously. I recorded in my fieldnotes:

> I can't figure out if it is her, the class, or a combination, but this class does not feel like AVID. The other [AVID] students I work with are motivated, respectful of their teachers; this feels like any other class. There is something I cannot pinpoint here that is missing compared to the other two. (Field notes, April 7, 2002)

I still have not identified why her class was so vastly different from the other AVID classes I observed. They are possibly experiencing the typical growing pains of learning a new program and experiencing a phenomenon that is openly discussed in new teacher training. I truly believe Kay is an excellent teacher and has the best interest of her kids in mind; however, the class rapport that was present with Kris and Henry was absent in this classroom. I overheard more than a few students complain, "I want to be in Ms. Jones's class" or "I hope

I won't be in here next year." Yet, I find within my fieldnotes constant comments about the fact that this is her rookie year in AVID and she has a demanding group of students. I recall the advice given in AVID training that implementing AVID takes at least a year. Although AVID has been in place at Regis for four years, this is Kay and her students' first experience with it.

Kay is cognizant of the need to set deadlines and hold her students to them:

> I'm learning to set boundaries for the students and I'm trying harder not to waver. I have a bad habit of saying something is due and then kids not doing it and then I'll give them a second or a third chance sometimes. I'm trying really hard not to do that because that's just… in the long run it's damaging to the kids and more stressful for me because then I'm grading things at the last minute that I shouldn't have to grade. I've learned how to cover myself as far as parents and things like that and making sure that I, umm, put things in writing, call parents when students aren't doing what they're supposed to be doing. (K. Stewart, interview, April 7, 2003)

Her resolve to be more rigid next year should result in a class that respects and follows deadlines, a skill that must be mastered by their senior year when they work on college applications with firm deadlines.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The end of May is met with the chaos of finishing the six weeks and preparing for final exams. AVID does not have a final per se, but Kay does want to see something of value from the students. “Finals are just around the corner, so we need to talk about what my expectations are for you,” she tells them. The students are sitting quietly, facing her and listening, or at least appear to be. A few scribble notes on blank paper as she speaks. Kay continues, “You need to locate one piece of writing we have completed this year, make sure it is perfectly edited, and turn it in along with the rest of your portfolio. Are there questions?” After giving appropriate wait time, she dismisses them to work. “Okay—let’s get started. This should not take any time out of class to complete.” They scatter across the room, locating folders, glue, and scissors. Some begin to look through their AVID notebooks, searching for the best piece of work to submit. Kay sits down in the back and a few students approach her. “Ms. Stewart, will you help me find my best writing?” and, “Can you proof this for me?” She smiles at them, takes their papers, and begins to read. More students approach her as they realize she is offering help.

When I think about my first day in Kay’s class, I am struck by how much of the class character was revealed to me that day. The students were assertive and curious, asking me about my work and bold in calling out comments. Their active participation fits well with Kay’s ability to draw them into spontaneous

discussions and to allow for their opinions to be heard. I recall their initial discussion about being rocks or feathers:—"I am a rock; I know what I want and how to get it. People cannot sway me from my beliefs"—and realize what Kay was doing that day: getting them to think about their characters, verbalize their opinions, and listen to others.

Kay and her students were both new to AVID and experienced the typical growing pains associated with inexperience. As Kay admitted at the end of the year, " I know next year will be better now that I have taught AVID for a year" (K. Stewart, personal communication, May 23, 2003). She is straightforward about her disappointment in this year: "I am a much better math teacher than AVID teacher, but I know next year can be better because I have done it once before" (K. Stewart, personal communication, May 23, 2003). She cares enough to be upset that the year did not go as well as planned. She laments the fact that AVID is

> …different from my other classes… I guess because I've been teaching algebra longer, I have my routine and the kids are used to the routine, I'm used to the routine. It's just easier in some ways. (K. Stewart, interview April 7, 2003)

As we talk on my last day, I learn that she has applications out at two suburban districts and, if given an offer, will leave.

> I like the kids here, I really do—I just don't know. I just feel like I am a better math teacher than AVID teacher. We live way out in the suburbs and I wouldn't mind teaching closer to home. Also, it has just been a difficult year in terms of what has happened here. (K. Stewart, personal communication, May 23, 2003)

I have since learned that Kay returned for her second year at Regis, but left at mid-term. However, this move was a result of some unfortunate personal circumstances rather than a conscious decision to leave Regis. I hope that she will continue in her quest to see students of color be placed in and succeed in honors courses and attend college. I hope that AVID is in her future because she is a teacher who cares and gives her best to the students who need it most, despite the first-year difficulties she has experienced.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AVID Illuminated

AVID was created by an English teacher who simply wanted to provide the best educational opportunities for her students who were bused to her affluent school. She had no special training, just an inherent belief that all students can succeed in the classroom with the right support system and a teacher who held high expectations for all of her students. Since that time, AVID methodology has crossed the continent, a training institute has been created, and thousands of teachers are now practitioners of its ideas and philosophies. There is no formula to using it, no magic recipe or single approach that defines a classroom as an AVID one. Its founders realized this early on: "AVID is not a cookie cutter program; each region, student population, school, and classroom demand constant adjustments. Flexibility was the AVID way" (Freedman, 2000, p. 302). The summer institute is a way of introducing basic facets of AVID, but teachers are given freedom concerning implementation of the principles. The way in which AVID takes shape will vary depending upon the teacher, as illustrated within the three data chapters.

Teachers in my study approached AVID in their own unique way. The classroom atmospheres reflected their individual teaching style and the groups of students with whom they worked. The following story will further demonstrate

that how teachers teach is deeply reflective of who they are as people, and that AVID teachers are able to define their own program because it is not rigid. The following is a description of a tragic day in the lives of the Regis community and how the teachers in my study responded in a humane, caring manner. The encounter stressed the importance of the teacher-student relationship in AVID and illuminated the theory that having the same four teacher for years whom students see everyday has a positive affect on the classroom climate.

TRAGEDY AT REGIS

Friday, March 28th, went along as any other day in terms of my research at Regis High School. In Henry's class, we were in the library finishing research on the world's greatest events. Henry and I sit and talk as the students diligently work on their research. I remark in my notes about how they seem so self-sufficient and will be ready to work on their own in college. Henry is busy grading exams for another class, but stops and helps students who approach him. In Kris's class, the day was uneventful as well. Students picked up recycling as usual while Kris graded their notebooks. The day does not stand out for me. From a researcher's standpoint, there was no indication of unusual circumstances. Unbeknownst to me at this time, Friday, March 28th, 2003 would be forever entrenched in the minds of all people associated with Regis High School.

Later that night, at around 9:00 p.m., my neighbor called and asked if I was all right. I responded blankly, "Of course, why?" She then informed me that

there had been a murder at Regis High School that day—she knew I went on Fridays and wanted to be sure I was not there at the time. Shocked, I responded that I had no idea, it must have happened later in the day. As I hung up the phone I was in denial—I thought she must be wrong, I would have known about something like that. I reluctantly turned on the television and switched to a local news channel. What I heard and saw on television was unreal, like something out of a terrifying movie. Apparently, right as school ended that Friday, a 16 year-old student stabbed and pushed down the stairs a 15 year-old girl, which resulted in her death. According to the news piece, she was his ex-girlfriend and the incident happened in front of many of the students. As I tuned into other news channels that night, I heard the same story repeatedly. Each time it hit me like a lightening bolt; I hurt for the teachers and kids—I felt for the parents of both kids. I mourned for the school that has worked so hard to overcome negative perceptions about its students and now with one terrible action taken by an individual student, their reputation would now be tarnished. This would surely turn into a blame game in which the media would try to blame the students, teachers, and parents.

My weekend was filled with scouring the papers and reading front-page headlines about the murder at Regis. The articles were full of accusatory tones, and not all against the perpetrator. Much of the blame fell onto the school and its leadership. The final article I read that weekend discussed an investigative team that was being created to decide whether or not Regis is a safe campus. The

headlines and accompanying articles read like something out of a television drama. I am not sure I can put into words the heavy sadness I felt at this news. Even though I was only remotely involved in the school, this tragedy affected me greatly. I felt like I had a heavy blanket over me all weekend. I could not write or work or reach out to my teachers. I could only imagine how hard this was on them if I was feeling the weight of sadness so immensely. My transcribed notes record this on the Monday morning after the tragedy:

> I must add here that I am transcribing on Monday, March 31st, and over the weekend a student was stabbed and killed at [Regis]. I cannot fully explain how I feel about this. I am apprehensive about returning, not for my own safety, but for the kids' well-being. I know many will be upset; the girl was well-known. I cannot imagine how they must be feeling: scared, sad, overwhelmed. Not to mention on a more practical level how it must affect the school—there is already such a negative perception out there about the school and its kids. I had several well-meaning friends call to check on me and say, "Isn't that kind of a rough school? Are you going back?" What a dumb question! What people don't realize is that the school and the kids are great; this does not reflect on [Regis]. It was a weird incident that realistically could have happened anywhere. Still, it does not bode well for the reputation of the school. (Fieldnotes, March 31, 2003)

As I approached the school on Monday morning, I felt sad and apprehensive about what I would see. I did not know which of the AVID students knew the boy and girl involved or if any of them had seen the murder. I also did not know how this tragedy affected the teachers in my study.

As I entered the front office, I could already tell that the school felt different. I recorded in my notes on March 31, 2003: "There is a heaviness in the air—it feels different here now—death has touched this place and its people." The media circus was unbelievable as trucks from local and state news channels parked out front and looked for people to interview. This particular death was so intense and sad because it was not a natural one; somebody was murdered in the halls that these students walked in each day. I felt helpless and wanted to crawl away. I entered the front office and saw adults standing around stone-faced; students milled around the office talking and crying. There were signs posted everywhere about the availability of counselors for students. The school had set up temporary offices for district counselors in the campus library. There were adults everywhere, in the halls and courtyard area and in the classrooms. There was a heavy feeling here, but also a feeling that the school was not alone. The principal was very visible that day as were other administrative office employees.

The experience of this tragedy reiterated the teachers' capacity to practice the AVID principles of caring and flexibility in their classrooms. Caring necessarily involves having a relationship with students that extends beyond

traditional student-teacher interactions and into real relationships with students as people. Each of the teachers in my study reflect part of what Goldstein (2002) includes in her definition of a caring encounter:

> The one-caring takes into consideration the other's wants, desires, and goals, which she has apprehended as a result of her receptivity, and reflects upon both his objective needs and what he expects of her. The appropriate caring response, then, is a contextually specific pair of individuals in a concrete situation. (p. 14)

The following sections are depictions of how each teacher in my study responded to this event. I will show the ways in which each teacher showed caring for his or her students and that their reactions were each grounded in specific contexts and represented the various levels of relationships that can evolve in an AVID classroom. In addition, flexibility will be examined in terms of how each teacher placed the needs of their students over curriculum requirements.

The second part of this discussion will focus on how each teacher's approach to this unusual set of circumstances were similar in regards to caring and flexibility, but also very different because of their varied approaches to teaching and because their approach reflects who they are as human beings. Each teacher's response to this tragedy reiterates some themes found in the data chapters and provides further insight into the unique relationships that develop between teacher and student in an AVID classroom.

KRIS

Kris is not one to hide her emotions; her feelings are evident in her eyes and her facial expressions. I can see that she is visibly upset, her eyes are red and swollen, and she looks as if she had not slept much in the past two days. She has a journal entry assignment posted on the board:

1. Describe the atmosphere at Regis today.
2. How do you feel? How do you think others are feeling?
3. At this point, what are your questions and concerns? How do you think they'll be answered?

Before she releases her students to purge their feelings on paper, she shares a bit of herself with them. She reveals that she "…cried all weekend. I'm a big crier, surprise, surprise, and could not stop worrying about how you guys were doing. I just wanted to see you and talk with you." She explains, "The journal assignment is optional; I wanted to provide some writing time for those of you that need it." As they write, I record in my notes, "I have grown sadder as the time progresses. Over the weekend this all seemed so far away, but now I am faced with the sad faces of students and the reality that someone they loved died" (Fieldnotes, March, 31, 2003).

After the writing exercise, students are more than willing to open up about the incident. A couple of students in this class saw the incident and choose to describe it in vivid detail, comments I will not include due to their graphic nature.

Another student shares with the class, “I know [name of student]—he could not have done this.” Kris lets this description ensue and advises both of them to talk to someone about what they saw. She advises the class, “You don’t have to talk to me if you don’t want, but please talk to someone, particularly if you saw this happen—it is an image that will stay with you for a long time.” Her tone is serious and the students listen intently to her words in between bouts of crying and shaking their heads in disbelief.

The tone of the students’ conversation eventually turns to who is to blame for the incident. Many students inquire, “Miss, why did it take so long for a teacher to reach her? If they got there sooner, maybe she would have been saved.” Kris is quick to respond:

> I know you guys need to make sense of this thing and the easiest way to do that is to place blame, but let me remind you that there are a lot of teachers here hurting and feeling bad enough about this without anyone trying to place blame. [Regis] is a family—we need to be here for each other. As hard as it is, please try not to become involved in the rumor mill that is sure to be filled with inaccuracies.

Her tone is firm, but loving, understanding their need to make sense of a catastrophic situation. She does not allow rumors and hearsay to dominate the conversation and reminds them not to participate in that kind of banter.

One student reveals, “My dad wants me to transfer to another school.” Shaking her head vehemently, Kris responds, “ I hope that won’t happen, Tonya. I really don’t feel that this incident reflects on the safety of our school.” The students begin discussing the media response to this tragedy and express that they think those outside the community are not surprised that this could happen here. One student hesitantly reveals that even a former graduate told him, “Only at Regis.” A male student chimes in, “ Ms. Jones, why are we never in the paper for doing something good, but the minute something bad happens the media is all over us?” Kris nods her head in agreement and adds, “You didn’t see the media hanging around when we won our UIL one-act play or our senior AVID students received 63 college acceptances.” Their response to this observation is to compose a letter to the local paper, which is eventually published, posing this question and accentuating the positive attributes of the school.

Kris concludes this difficult day by reminding them that she loves them and is available to talk if needed. “Take care of yourselves. I am here for you if you need me. Seeing you guys has really helped me, I was worried about you all weekend.” Her students look at her with sad eyes and faces, but many attempt a small smile in response to her statement. Approximately a week later, I was able to sit down with Kris and discuss this tragedy in terms of her reaction to it.

> Early in the weekend, when… I mean, I found out right after it happened because I talked to Sara—we had plans that night and I called her. Luckily

> I was off campus already because I just… there's been a lot of things going on with me personally that I don't think I could have handled something that, you know, graphic. I guess that would be the word. But I started out with a lot of crying and then I spent the night with my mother because my parents did not want me to be by myself. I remember a lot of phone conversations with teachers, just trying to sort through things and all of that… calling to check on me constantly, you know that type of thing. I couldn't go to church on Sunday. I just couldn't face anybody. It was like I just needed to grieve and deal and then I wondered how I was going to have the strength on Monday and finally I reached the point where I just went, "Okay, I'm ready, I'm just ready to go and deal"… as soon as I drove up on Monday, I mean, tears in my eyes immediately, like as soon as I even saw the school. And then once we went into the library, I mean, I just, you know, held it together, but I definitely cried. Our superintendent stood up and cried and talked about losing a kid on his watch and, you know… it was just hard. But onceI was in the classroom… (K. Jones, interview, April 9, 2003)

Kris gave credit to the kids for her ability to function—and likened it to a spouse who loses her/his partner, but continues to function for the kids. "I don't know how they make it better, the kids, but they do. They take my focus away

from other things." Kris credits her relationship with her students for getting her through such a difficult time:

> I think it validates the whole concept of having a real relationship with your students so that when they're—when something happens that—it's made me feel that I should be a lot more community-oriented in my curriculum. That we should be getting the word out about all the good things that are going on here, that the kids should be allowed to vocalize, you know, all of the good that they see…. Pedagogically, how can I help them get a voice? (K. Jones, interview, April 9, 2003)

Kris's response to this and the caring relationship she shares with her students was evident during this time. She attributes teaching English to her insight into her students. "They'll write me things that they won't normally say. I think they have this radar about when someone's genuine about them" (K. Jones, interview, April 9, 2003). This tragedy manifested a deep, caring bond between teacher and students in this classroom. I knew Kris cared deeply for her students, but I had no idea her level of love and commitment to these kids until the calamity of March 28, 2003.

Kris embodied caring in her heartfelt response to her students. She cried with them and poured out her feelings to them: "I cried all weekend…" she freely admitted and then cried again during class. The atmosphere in the class that day is difficult to describe, but could be recognized as a cathartic experience for all

involved. The students who witnessed the accident describe the scene. “Miss, I can’t get the image out of my head,” one student says while grasping his forehead and shaking his head. Kris looks at him for a long time, listening, and moves to his desk. “Please be sure to talk to someone, either me or one of the counselors. You are going to need help in dealing with what you saw. You’re right, those images are forever printed in your memory.” The student nods his head in the affirmative and looks down toward his desk, his eyes filling with tears. Kris places her hand on his shoulder and gives it a squeeze.

When another student vocalizes the thought, “Miss, I know he didn’t do it,” Kris allows this as well, knowing the student needs to believe that right now in order to deal with her emotions. Her discussion is open to all students’ feelings without being evaluative or judgmental. It is a small sanctuary of protection for students experiencing great turmoil. Her room is a safe, caring venue for students to think, respond, and react in whatever way they deemed appropriate.

The theme of flexibility was illustrated as well because Kris put academics on the backburner for the entire week after this event. Monday was spent talking and writing about the incident and Wednesday was basically cancelled due to the high absentee rate as students attended the funeral of the murdered girl. On Friday, Kris had two guest speakers, law students from the local university, a move that worked brilliantly as students were very interested and seemed to be ready to talk about anything but the sadness they had been dealing with all week.

Kris admits, “I thought it might be a nice distraction and I know a lot of my students are interested in going to law school” (K. Jones, personal communication, April 4, 2003). It was a last-minute idea and had to be organized quickly, but Kris pulled it off and as a result, her students returned to some sort of normalcy as they listened attentively, took notes on the presentation, and asked questions of the students. I could see that they were already on their way to healing and I believe Kris’s flexibility in curriculum planning sped that process along.

As established within her chapter, Kris shared a remarkable relationship with her students, full of rapport and caring. It was the strong rapport, I believe, that enabled her to discuss this tragedy in a way that healed herself and her students. Just as she is able to kid around with her students, she is also able to reveal her sadness and sorrow at this time. Crying, she shares with them, “ I love you guys and the thought of you is what got me out of bed this morning to come here.” She makes this statement while gazing intently into the eyes of her students, her own eyes wet with tears. At her words, many students’ tears resumed as both male and female students cried openly. There exists a feeling of safety and security that allows for open and honest discussion of a very difficult topic.

Shocked students are able to vocalize their feelings: “ He didn’t do this, he didn’t do this,” one student kept saying, shaking her head. “I can’t stop seeing the blood,” another says as his fellow students continue to cry, some coming over to

him to offer a supportive touch. Kris orchestrates the conversation as best she can, allowing students to purge emotions and seek guidance from her. Prior to this incident, I recognized the familial feel in this room, but did not realize the depth of it until they worked through a horrible tragedy together. The rapport between teacher and student and among students was made more evident in the aftermath of this tragedy. I would never have been able to see the depth of their bond had this catastrophic incident not occurred.

HENRY

During my walk to Henry's room, the district AVID coordinator, Dr. Grant, catches up to me and walks with me. "You should know that Henry saw the whole thing—it happened in the hallway just outside of his classroom. I am really worried about him." My heart falls as I imagine how awful he must be feeling. I walk into the room where he is talking to the AVID campus coordinator, Sara. He has a stack of letters he is handing out to his students as they walk into the room. I quickly pat him on the arm, a small gesture of my concern, and take my seat. It is immediately apparent that this tragedy has affected the students in this room immensely. At least half the class is in tears while the other half sits stone-faced. One student in who is always all smiles and everyday greets me with, "Hello, Ma'am, how are you?" is sitting with his head in his hands. I look around and the scene is one of complete disaster: students look shocked and sad and look toward their teacher for some kind of reassurance.

Henry offers this reassurance in the form of a letter he wrote to his students, it is very personal and describes the grief he is feeling. The following are excerpts from that letter which illustrate his feelings well:

> I am uncertain of how many of you were spectators last Friday. I am uncertain how many of you knew [the student]. I am uncertain of the rumors in the air. I am uncertain about your emotional climate. I am uncertain…. I am in need of just a few days of, not trying to push you to your academic limits, but providing space for you to think things through as I wish I had done when I lost my two dearest friends. I don't know what else to say except that I love you all. (H. Miller, personal communication, March 31, 2003)

As he reads the letter and shares his pain, I begin to cry, hard enough to have to get up and get a tissue. I feel a bit awkward at this time; I am so removed from the situation, yet Henry's caring and love for his students is so amazing to watch that I am deeply moved. My fieldnotes read:

> He shares that he doesn't know where to go from here. In the past, he has dealt with this kind of pain with drugs and alcohol and more recently by being a workaholic. This student's death has forced him to face his own losses head on. Henry is just so real and open with them; it is a beautiful event to witness. It encompasses a true caring teacher-student relationship. He opens up a forum for them to deal with their pain saying things like,

> "This is a safe haven, a temple for you. However you want to play out your sorrows is okay with me." And, "You guys get it done right. I want to make sure you get it done right, don't make the mistakes I did." (Fieldnotes, March 31, 2003)

He has brought some blank CDs for the students to create a CD in memory of the student who was killed. They are also allowed to write in journals, talk about it, or sit quietly if they choose.

Dr. Grant informs the students, "I saw a reporter this morning walking around asking where she could find crying students. They will sink very low to get a story; avoid them!" The students nod their heads in response to her comments. After allowing time to write and think, Henry calls on his students to respond saying,

> This story has been misconstrued in the media and [has] placed a black eye on our campus. When you guys are ready, I suggest you hop on our website and respond to the media at some level. We can put a positive message out there in a venue we have control over. You may also compose a letter to the editor as Ms. Jones's class did.

In the days that followed, I observe many students responding to this tragic event on the school's website. Most entries focus on the fact that good things are happening at Regis as well and that it is a safe place to go to school. Others use the website as a forum to eulogize their missing friend.

As with Kris, my interview with Henry was well-timed in terms of opening up a forum to talk about this recent event. He was open to talk about it in terms of his feelings and his concern for his students. He did not discuss the fact that he had seen the incident and I did not press him on this matter. I asked him about the letter, what gave him the inspiration for that, and how he was able to deal with his own grief while trying to assess what his students needed. He replied:

> I've never wanted to crawl under a rock instead of coming here. I've never really wanted to stay home, definitely times when I was tired, but never just out of not wanting to deal with something. All weekend [pause] I did a lot of exercising and just thinking about it and I wanted to be as understanding and as human as I could be, and, umm… really wanted to make sure that whatever I was doing was not trying to just… just spread over or trying to blur the pain that was definitely going to be around. (H. Miller, interview, April 7, 2003)

His ability to "crawl out from under that rock" and return for the sake of his students was amazing and genuine. I think the students truly felt safe in his room to cry and voice their feelings. Henry revealed that his school and home persona were very different.

At school, Henry was able to put his own needs aside to help his students, but at home he was different. He revealed,

> I spent much of my time just trying to be really observant and really conscientious of what they were thinking. So I wasn't—I just wasn't thinking about my own reaction at all. It was different when I got home though, I mean, I had some wacky mood swings and crazy stuff go down last week that just were… odd. But while I was on campus, I just didn't address it. (H. Miller, interview, April 7, 2003)

Henry did an excellent job of appearing in control and available to his students. Part of his goal was to get them to critically observe how the media was handling this event and what they could proactively do to deter the negative reporting. He took issue with the fact that the media had handled a negative incident at a cross-town school quite differently:

> One of the things that came up is that it would not be treated the same way on a different campus. Like things that I would, you know, consider much more… you know, if six of my students went out and beat up a special education student, I would consider that much more problematic. (H. Miller, interview, April 7, 2003)

He refers to an event that happened at another school in the northwest part of town. The media chose to portray this incident as a few bad kids at a good school, rather than reporting that the whole school was tarnished as they had done with Regis**.** The local paper reported the city's decision to launch an official inquiry into the safety of students at the high school. In the days that followed, Henry

read aloud the local paper's reporting of the incident at Regis. Henry and his students critiqued the articles and the effects of its content on the school climate. Henry's request for his students to be proactive allowed them to take their pain and channel it in a positive manner. I was deeply touched by the interaction I witnessed between Henry and his students. A relationship beyond that of a mere teacher and student was evident as they shared their tears and their pain.

Henry demonstrated caring in much the same way as Kris, by being honest and open with his students about his own feelings and his concern for them: "I spent most of this weekend in bed, trying not to deal with it…. I know many of you saw what happened and for you, you have a very different understanding of what happened than those who did not see it." He monologues much of the class, sharing his personal reaction and how this affected him at a deeply personal level. The letter mentioned in the first part of this chapter is particularly moving and pours out his feelings openly and honestly. As he reads it, I see many students crying openly and though no one vocalizes it, I get the sense that they appreciated his candor and ability to share with them as peers rather than as students. I record in my notes, "[Henry] has shared, allowed for feedback, and provided some active things they can do to handle pain—he is phenomenal" (Fieldnotes, March 31, 2003).

Henry also demonstrated flexibility in response to the murder when he stopped work on a research paper in his AVID class. This was a tough call as the

year is coming to a close and I know he really wants to provide his students with an opportunity to complete a college-level research paper before they graduate. However, he also recognizes his students' need to be heard and healed, and places this need above their academic needs. Henry not only spends the week after the tragedy discussing and writing in response to it, he also allows for an additional week dedicated to response via the campus website and local paper. He and his students read aloud each day from the local paper and discuss the inaccuracies they hear. By April 14, he is back on track as far as academics are concerned, but does amend his original project:

> I am changing the research paper assignment in response to recent events. Instead of a full-blown paper, I will take thesis statement, outline, citations—in other words, all the steps of a major paper must be there, but not the paper itself. We need to reserve time for your college budget, which you must do before you go and I want your last few weeks in here to be fun for you.

Sighs of relief are simultaneous and small cheers of "yes!" are heard. Henry smiles and says, "we still have work to do—you're not totally off the hook!"

Further, Henry approached this incident in a manner that reiterated his role as a facilitator for his students. He was a catalyst for their healing and a model of how to handle difficult situations in life. He led a brief discussion and made his feelings evident via a letter to his students. However, the bulk of his response

focused on the students' need to self-reflect and come to terms with it in his or her own way. His thoughts on this centered on the need for them to be active in their responses:

> I wanted to make sure that whatever I was doing was really paying attention to it and that they were at least going to have one class where we [were] really not only looking at what had happened, but commenting on it and being a little more proactive about it. (H. Miller, interview, April 7, 2003)

His response is typical of his approach to this class; they are mature, independent students on the brink of adulthood. As such, they are capable of dealing with the incident without a lot of hand holding by Henry. He is blatant in this belief: "How is it that you want to deal with it?" He asks this question of his students midway into class and waits for their response. When no one replies he says,

> I realize you may be all talked out by now. In the past, I have written about lost loved ones or burned a CD in their honor. I have provided materials for you to respond in one of these ways if you wish, or you can just sit quietly or talk, whatever you choose…. This is a safe haven, a temple for you; however you want to play out your sorrows is okay with me.

Because he has fostered independent learning skills in his students, they are able to direct their own curriculum at this time and in the days that follow.

Henry's students continue to react to the tragedy in the weeks following, but in a way that typifies their independence. The students are animated in their reactions to various news articles Henry shares with them at the beginning of each day. Students call out, "Man, that's not right!" or, "How do they know, they don't go to our school!" Many compose letters to the editor and continue their work on the website. Henry shares with me that the website serves as a "… forum for students to respond to this tragedy and represent to the public their feelings about it all" (H. Miller, personal communication, April 4, 2003). He completely trusts that they will respond in their own time and in their own manner, and they do because they are self-reliant and able to think and take action with little direct instruction from Henry.

KAY

That same day, the AVID director and I went to Kay's class to offer some support there. By this point in the day, after lunchtime, the students appear pretty talked out. Most in this class report that all they have done in all of their classes is discuss this—they seem tired. Despite their comments, they begin to talk about what they know—many begin to discuss rumors that the young man involved had told many people that he and a knife and was going to kill this girl. A student comments, "He asked for help; they didn't give it to him." Students in this class seem concerned with blaming someone, namely teachers they feel were given warning signs, and with what the school is going to do now. Kay does not provide

an opportunity for students to place blame on teachers and reminds them, “None of us knows the real story here, so be careful of gossiping about unknown facts.” She redirects the conversation to a discussion of violence in relationships and how to recognize the signs.

Kay approaches the class as suggested by the district with a focus on violent relationships, how to recognize them, how to help, and how to get out of one. Her tone is serious and the students listen earnestly as she makes inquiries such as, “Is it okay for a boyfriend or girlfriend to tell you what to wear or who you can hang out with? What should you do if your boyfriend or girlfriend threatens you or hurts you?” The students were understandably not very cooperative in terms of offering answers, but for one student, the topic was so upsetting that she got up and left the room. Kay did not miss a beat, but kept the discussion going as if the student had not just left. The district AVID coordinator went after the student, saying to Kay, “I’ll go and check on her.” I remember thinking how odd that a student would just leave class with no response from the teacher. Later, I discover why Kay had not responded and discovered the depth of her relationship with this student. “I knew that Donna could potentially get upset. She lives in an environment where domestic violence is a part of her everyday life. I knew she just needed to get out of here and would return when she was ready” (K. Stewart, personal communication, March 31, 2003). Because she was familiar with the whole child, she knew the appropriate response. Her words rang

true when the student reappeared toward the end of class and sat back down in her seat. Kay's knowledge of the student's personal life helped her to respond in a caring manner.

I record in my notes that day, "Kay is caring, but cautious—she is understandably unsure about how to approach the topic" (Fieldnotes, March 31, 2003). She read from handouts that the district had supplied to all teachers at Regis, recommending that they discuss the issue in terms of abusive relationships. Her retreat into reading from the papers in her hand was a clue into how uncomfortable she was with a situation in which her students had clearly taken over and were ready to discuss who was to blame. Her comments about this were as follows:

> I feel like people are looking to blame someone and sometimes there really isn't one particular person to blame and I'm worried that might happen. I asked them who was ultimately responsible for the girl's death. Ultimately it was the young man…. I just reminded them then if we're to say an adult at Regis is responsible because she said she was worried for whatever reason, then we have to include every other person that she said she was worried to, so that means every person she confided in.… If we're to blame one, then we're to blame everybody else too, so, ummm, I just didn't want them to get to that point. I think right now a lot of students are pointing the finger at [Regis] and some students are saying a staff member

> was responsible and who is that? Are we all responsible because we all work for [Regis]? There could have been some intervention, but ultimately he decided to do what he did. (K. Stewart, interview, April 7, 2003)

Kay was caught in a situation where she wanted to allow a venue for discussion, but wanted to deter students from misplaced blame or from failing to realize that in the end the individual who takes the action is the one accountable. The theme of personal responsibility was being avoided and she wanted to point this out without being disrespectful of their feelings, " I feel like they are looking for someone to blame besides the individual who took the action" (K. Stewart, personal communication, March 31, 2003).

After class that day I was privy to a moving interaction between Kay and one of her students. The student was one with whom Kay had experienced conflict with in the past. This student constantly questioned Kay's directives and was, in general, pretty disrespectful toward her. The student was loud and often talked across the room to her friend while Kay was talking. Despite their seemingly adversarial relationship, Kay took notice of her despair and asked, "Mia, do you need to talk to someone?" Mia got out of her seat and goes to Kay and cried in her arms. "Miss, I knew this was gonna happen. Matt told me he wanted to hurt her, but I thought he was just messing around." Kay took her in her arms and hugged her as she sobbed. After a bit of time, she moved her face to where Mia could look straight at her and looked intently into her eyes and said,

"Listen to me: You are in no way responsible for what that boy did. No one could have known what he was going to do." Mia, still crying, said "But Miss, she was my friend and I didn't say anything, I thought he was playin,'" Kay repeated adamantly, "This is not your fault, it is his fault, he decided to do what he did." Mia stayed for a long time after the bell to compose herself. I remark: "Wow—how moving to see this. It is amazing to me because I know Kay is not particularly fond of this student" (Fieldnotes, March 31, 2003). Kay was able to put aside negative feelings about this student and strengthen and build their relationship through this encounter and it seemed to heal the rift between these two. Mia was quieter after this and adopted a friendlier demeanor toward Kay.

Kay illustrates caring in her attention to her students after the tragedy, not by crying or pouring out her emotions as Kris and Henry did, but taking the time to allow a forum for student conversation. Her seeming discomfort in talking about the incident should not be mistaken for not caring, because I could tell that she did by the other actions she took that day. For example, she suggested, "Would you like to write a letter to [name of murdered student's] mom?" and then allowed time for them to craft moving letters expressing their sadness, both for themselves and for her. Kay took the time to mail these letters to this mom who was hurting so profoundly and deeply. As previously mentioned, she also spent much of her after-class time that day with a student who felt like she played a part in the tragedy. She referred to this student a few days later: "There's one of my

students that I'm a little worried about. She's a pretty emotional student and she was friends with both of them and I think it hit her really hard" (K. Stewart, personal communication, April 9, 2003).

Kay cared deeply, but manifested her feelings it in a very different way than the other two teachers. Kay's approach to this incident was different from the other two AVID teachers' because of her reliance on administrative protocol. The other AVID teachers did not broach the topic of domestic abuse, but instead allowed their students to write and reflect on the situation. Perhaps this was a result of her class being more vocal and the fact that they had more time during the day to circulate rumors and discuss them. They tend to be an aggressive class by nature and were no different in this situation. The students listened half-heartedly and made little comment after the domestic violence lesson began. They gladly complied with her suggestion to compose a letter to the murdered student's mother. Many knew the girl and her family and as they wrote tears were shed once again. Kay received the letters and told her students that she would get the letters to the intended party.

Kay was sensitive throughout the week after this event and lightened the academic load for the week, particularly on Wednesday when most students were out for the funeral. Kay admitted to a business-as-usual approach in her math classes because her students "preferred to do that than to talk about it" (K. Stewart, personal communication, March 31, 2003). She was flexible enough to

recognize the different needs in her classes and respond accordingly. She placed academics on the backburner, but realized that by the next week it would benefit her students to move on as best as possible. “I think for some it will be good to get back to work, back to some sort of normalcy. This week has been really hard for them” (K. Stewart, personal communication, April 5, 2003).

Flexibility was exercised the week following the tragedy. Kay allowed all of her classes to talk about their feelings or write, whatever they deemed appropriate and, as a result, missed an entire day of curriculum. This was difficult in her math classes because of the bulk of information that must be covered each day. Kay recognized and honored the need to adapt her curriculum: “I shortened lessons throughout the week and I didn’t give as much homework as I usually do…. academics were definitely on the backburner” (K. Stewart, interview, April 7, 2003). On Wednesday, most students were out for the funeral and on Friday Kay focused on her student’s need to be heard:

> I told them that we’d have a discussion about it and I wrote out some questions for them to answer before we started talking because I wanted them to have their thoughts a little more organized, because its an easy topic to get emotional about. (K. Stewart, interview, April 7, 2003)

By the next week, it was time to resume a normal schedule and Kay felt this was appropriate and that some kids “actually preferred to get back to work” (K. Stewart, personal communication, April 5, 2003).

In Kay's classroom, the initial reaction to this tragedy allowed for a lot of student-led discussion and reaction, typical of Kay's practice to allow for student voice. As previously mentioned, Kay attempted to follow district guidelines and focus on the domestic abuse issue embedded within this murder. As she began, a student called out, "Somebody could have done something to stop this. [Name of girl] had gone to a counselor earlier in the day saying she was afraid." Other students chimed in, "Yeah, I heard he threw a girl down the stairs last year." The conversation quickly transformed into a boisterous hotbed of attacks on the administration of the school. The reaction was typical of this class; they had strong opinions and were accustomed to vocalizing them. To Kay's credit, she recognized their need to be heard, while encouraging them to channel their energy in another direction.

Kay was quick to stop her students from placing blame on the staff, stating in a firm tone, "I realize you guys need to make sense of this somehow, but this is not going to be a forum for rumors to be spread!" Her emotion and inability to compromise on this fact was not lost on her students. They stopped the blame game and allowed her to continue with her domestic abuse talk. Later, she justified her choice to stifle student outbursts at this time:

> I think right now a lot of students are pointing the finger at Regis… and at the staff… even teachers that did teach both or one of them didn't know anything was going on. (K. Stewart, interview, April 7, 2003)

Kay normally would have allowed her students a place to discuss theories and opinions, but not in a situation where their theories were unfounded and had the capability of harming a colleague's reputation. The bell rang and the students slowly filed out, looking tired and downtrodden. My fieldnotes read, "They look so tired, I imagine they cannot wait for this day to end" (Fieldnotes, March 31, 2003).

AFTERMATH

I will never forget the weight of that tragedy, both on myself and on the teachers and students at Regis. An event that could have destroyed a school brought them together as the family they have become. Although the media continues to place blame in the form of an ongoing investigative study, Regis staff and students know they are in a safe place where people care about each other. As a student fittingly stated, "We are a family. We love each other." I am honored to have witnessed the beautiful rapport present between my participants and their students. It illustrates one of the things Mary Catherine Swanson set out to accomplish with AVID: "[A] vital task in AVID was to instill pride and self-confidence so that her students knew they could tackle things in life and conquer them" (Freedman, 2000, p. 144). The AVID students at Regis did not allow this incident to kill their self-confidence, but instead became more committed to demonstrating pride in themselves and their school. Even in the midst of tragedy, these teachers put aside their own needs and placed their students first. Their

relationships with their students are full of love and caring and yet flexible enough to adapt to varying situations, both positive and negative. I cannot say that the school moved on while I was there, but they definitely healed as time went by. This healing occurred despite the ongoing negative media attention that continued into the summer months. People outside of the school community may refer to Regis as "the school were the murder happened," but those of us involved with the staff and students know that this one incident does not reveal the true climate of the school. March 28, 2003, started out ordinary, but forever changed the atmosphere of the school and the lives of its people.

The murder at Regis High School allowed me to observe the themes of caring and flexibility at a level that would not have been possible in any other way. The intensity of caring for students by teachers was inconceivable until the aftermath of this event. It stressed the importance of an AVID classroom as one where students have a venue where they can deal with circumstances that arise in their lives and where a teacher exists who can provide the love and safety they need. Additionally, it illuminated the characteristics specific to each teacher's pedagogy, demonstrating that AVID does not require a formulaic teaching approach. Each teacher dealt with this tragedy in a way fitting to the relationship he or she shared with his or her distinct classroom of students.

CONCLUSION

Responding to the Research Question

My dissertation focused on the nature of the teaching-learning relationship within AVID, a program designed to positively affect minority student access to honors courses and increase college attendance rates for this population. I introduced my study and provided a clear background of AVID in the form of a literature review that outlined the programs that led to the possibility of a program like AVID to exist. I discussed my research question and couched it in terms of the lack of qualitative information available on AVID pedagogy and the need for this type of research. I then outlined the specific methodology for my study of AVID, described my process of data analysis, and presented the limitations of my study. Next, I introduced AVID and its founder, and discussed the three principles of writing, inquiry, and collaboration that are hallmarks of the AVID program. Three examples, in the form of data chapters were then offered in an effort to describe the common themes I observed in each classroom as well as describe the individual pedagogy of each AVID teacher. I then described an event that brought the principles to life at a deeper level and provided additional insight into the special relationship shared between AVID teachers and their students.

Future Research

This study offers a small-scale attempt to shed light on a program that works to open academic doors to honors courses and college for underrepresented

populations. I have examined three teachers' practices in an effort to illuminate how they enact AVID principles as well as how they are able to bring their unique pedagogical styles to the teaching encounter. I also described a catastrophic event at the research site that allowed for a deeper analysis of these elements. Next, I will address the specific areas where emphasis must be placed in future attempts to examine the college preparatory program known as AVID.

AVID has as an explicit goal the desire to "increase school-wide learning and performance" (*Shaping the American Dream*, 2003, p. iii). The program started in a single classroom, but the effectiveness of its methods was realized quickly.

> Although AVID was originally developed to meet the needs of underachieving and linguistic minority and low-income students, it resulted in the complete transformation of the high school and students from all backgrounds began attaining higher levels of achievement. (*Shaping the American Dream*, 2003, p. 1)

A more comprehensive study could examine the effects of AVID on the culture of the school. At the local level, a researcher could ask, how has AVID affected teaching practices in all classrooms at Regis High School? Has the culture of the school changed in terms of students believing they can succeed in honors courses and attend college? AVID has an explicit goal of becoming "a catalyst to comprehensive reform of the entire instructional program rather than merely

serving as an add-on to the existing program" (*Shaping the American Dream*, 2003, p. 4.). Because of this goal, every school that implements the program should be investigated in terms of whether or not AVID teaching methods and attitudes have infiltrated the school. A researcher might visit core subject classrooms and see which, if any, AVID principles are present in classrooms outside of the AVID room. A researcher could also talk to students not in AVID and discover whether or not the goal of getting to college has spread to all students.

My research addressed the fact that AVID can be implemented in several ways and by varied personalities. A study examining a larger pool of teachers could be of interest to those who train AVID instructors: perhaps a study seeking to discover any common traits of AVID teachers or looking to see if all AVID teachers enact fundamental AVID principles of writing, inquiry, and collaboration. In my search for literature on AVID, I found a lack of information on what the program looks like in a classroom, and I witnessed a roomful of teachers in the training institute who desperately wanted this information. There is information available on best pedagogical practices used within an AVID classroom, but more studies looking at actual AVID teachers and reporting on their methodology would fill in the gaps in research and provide a model for new teachers to AVID.

I also believe an in-depth study on the voluntary nature of the program would be of great value. One of the AVID essentials listed in the training manual reads as follows: “AVID program participants, both students and staff, must choose to participate” (*Shaping the American Dream*, 2003, p. 48). This fact is reiterated several times during training, both in writing and orally; yet, the city where I conducted my research has received a grant from a local business to implement AVID in all high schools. As a result, there were teachers present during training who had not volunteered for the position and one in particular who openly expressed her displeasure in being assigned to AVID. A study that examines how many AVID programs are adhering to the essential element of having only teachers who volunteer to teach in its program would be valuable. In addition, this study could address the effects of disseminating a program nationwide and reveal how this often changes fundamental principles of the program. One of the appeals of AVID is that it is one of the only school reforms that was not mandated from the top down, but was the result of an innovative teacher in a single classroom (Freedman, 2000). Forced participation is an element AVID’s founder, Mary Catherine Swanson, wanted to avoid:

> AVID could not be forced on a student, a teacher, or a school. It depended on participants making a choice to take the risk of becoming involved. There could be no advancement without individual determination. (Freedman, 2000, p. 262)

To place AVID within the framework of a mandate issued by the school district strays from its original purpose and allure. A study to investigate whether or not this is occurring would help to address potential problems that may result from wide dissemination of AVID.

Future research into the AVID program will need to be expanded at a national level. The results and models provided both in the literature on AVID and at the training institute are based on a few studies in a few locales. This program has dispersed rapidly and Ms. Swanson realized quickly that the spread of AVID could compromise its quality and water down its methodologies (Freedman, 2000). Additional research is needed in all areas to make sure that AVID programs adhere to the original purpose and structure. In addition, at the training institute as AVID methodology was revealed, many teachers had the same question: What does it look like in practice? They felt that the handbooks and guidelines were beneficial but were very interested in seeing the program in action. More studies similar to mine in which researchers observe and report on real teachers and real students would be beneficial for practitioners of AVID.

I believe an in depth study seeking student perceptions of AVID, its principles, and its teachers would be extremely enlightening. Too often, we rely on hard data and research by so-called "experts" to evaluate a program. An examination by those who matter—the students— would provide information that we as educators cannot have access to and that would help a program improve. It

is easy to look at quantitative data and deem a program successful, but only when we examine its effects from the point of view of those it aims to help will we get the complete picture.

The barrier to this type of research is the amount of time it takes to establish a relationship with students in which they trust the researcher and will confide openly to him or her. I believe a study that focuses on student perceptions could only be valid if an AVID teacher conducted the study, perhaps during the senior year after three years have been spent building a relationship between teacher and students. Only then would students feel comfortable offering their insights into AVID.

A relatively large void in research is in longitudinal studies following students from high school to college. There is significant quantitative data about student success and attrition in college, but little in the area of how AVID students succeed once they get to college. What are the challenges and solutions; to whom do they go for help? It is not known if AVID creates independent college-level learners or if students get to college and find that they have difficulty in academics without the AVID benefits of caring teachers, tutors, and peer support. Mehan et al. (1996) conducted a small study of AVID students after their freshmen year in college, but replicas of this study are needed to obtain more information. A study conducted perhaps at the end of the freshmen year in college, or, better yet, one that follows a few AVID students during their

freshmen year would illuminate whether or not AVID truly does create independent learners able to function on their own at the next level of education.

IMPLICATIONS

In closing, I will offer specific contributions made by my examination of the pedagogy used within three AVID classrooms. First, I illustrated that AVID is a program that employs teachers who hold high expectations for their students and for the most part, reject the prevalent deficit models in education. Second, my study added to a limited amount of qualitative research on a program that seeks increase access to honors courses and college enrollment for students of color. Thirdly, I conceptualized the practice of three AVID teachers, transmitting the role of AVID principles in their practice and their abilities to bring who they are as humans into the teaching encounter. I will now explore each of these implications in greater depth.

The teachers in my study somehow avoided the pitfall of thinking that their students could not succeed in school because of internal deficiencies. Although I point out a few times in which deficit-laden language is used, the majority of the teacher's actions and comments went against the idea that students were to blame for academic failure. Instead, they believed that each student in their AVID classroom could succeed both in high school and in college. This finding is important because of the widespread use of deficit-theory models in colleges of education (Valencia, 1997). How did these teachers, educated in three

diverse environments, come to believe that students who were not supposed to succeed in schools could, in fact, do so? Investigating this idea and looking to recruit this type of teacher to teach in AVID classrooms is paramount to the program's success. My study provides a model of three teachers who deny the deficit model on a daily basis.

AVID denies the idea that "students in low-income and minority neighborhoods are more likely to get less experienced teachers than students in more affluent neighborhoods" (Mehan, 1996, p. 7). AVID teachers typically volunteer for their positions and have strong desires to see kids succeed who are usually dismissed or tracked into vocational classes. The teachers I worked with were not brand-new teachers that were placed in the worst school or teachers low on the seniority pole assigned to AVID; rather, they chose their current positions. All three teachers wanted to teach this population of students and specifically wanted to teach in the AVID program. As a result, the students had the best, most qualified teachers teaching them everyday. My study seeks to provide a space for discussion among practitioners of AVID and other programs that seek to provide equal education opportunities for students that are usually dismissed as unable to succeed in school.

In providing three models of AVID classrooms, I have provided a template to "see" the program in action. During summer training, I repeatedly heard teachers ask, "But what does that look like with real students in a real

classroom?" The teachers were having difficulty imagining the theories presented in practice in actual classrooms. They often deferred to me simply because I had worked in AVID classrooms and had seen the principles in action. This research provides the missing piece in AVID research and training and answers the question, "What does it look like in practice?"

In addition, I illustrate how teachers are able to adhere to AVID ideas and still bring who they are as people into the teaching encounter. The familial relationship that develops between an AVID teacher and his or her students is discussed within AVID literature and my work was able to support this claim. The close relationships between my participants and their students were illustrated in daily practice and shown more deeply in the aftermath of the murder at Regis High School. This depiction brings life to the words Mary Catherine Swanson spoke to her first group of AVID trainees: "*We* is the identity that AVID creates" (Freedman, 2000, p. 257). My participants work alongside their students as mentors and guides on the path to academic success and provide one solution to what we as educators can do to improve the educational experiences of students of color.

CRITIQUE AND QUESTIONING

AVID is an example of one program designed to improve academic experiences for students of color. The program uses specific teaching strategies to illuminate the hidden curriculum. For example, AVID teachers explicitly discuss

strategies to achieve success in academic courses Teachers accomplish this when they teach students how to take Cornell notes, a type of note-taking that leads to a better understanding of academic content. In my study, Kay went so far as to introduce Bloom's taxonomy and teach them how to ask questions at the various levels. She was explicit in her goal of getting them to ask questions about academic courses at the highest level of knowledge. Kris acknowledged the culture of power when she taught her students how to approach an adult with a request. She acknowledged that fact that there are codes of behavior in schools and, in order to get the results desired, it is necessary to speak and act in specific ways.

Henry recognized the power structure of society in his response to a letter the students composed to obtain financial support for their senior trip. His words are worthy of repetition here, "You guys are not victims. Re-write this letter to reflect the capable, deserving students you are, not as poor victims who need a handout." He also taught his students how to critically examine societal response to the murder at their high school and to respond in a way that reflected the reality of the atmosphere of the school. He pointed out the negative views people outside of school held about them and provided an outlet for their responses.

The teachers in my study engaged in some significant practices to address the hidden curriculum of schools and the culture of power. However, within AVID there is not enough critical examination of systemic racism or focus on

issues of racism in student's lives and in their community. It can be further argued that AVID does not accomplish an in depth analysis of the hidden curriculum because by its very nature it perpetuates the status quo. The nature of the goals of AVID, succeeding in academic courses and attending four-year colleges, reflect the goals of the White, dominant culture. Implicit within AVID is the unquestioning acceptance of the program and its goals by the students.

I would also argue that AVID does not qualify as an untracking system for schools as Mehan suggests in his writing. While it does broaden the existing tracks to include a more diverse group of learners, it is still a meritocratic belief system that does not benefit all of the students in a school. It is a significant step toward the goal of dismantling tracking, but does not successfully attain this goal in its present form.

AVID is one way of examining the phenomenon of teachers instructing students of color in specific methods to achieve academic success in schools. As stated earlier, there are other programs that could be used to study this same occurrence. My interest was not in one particular program, but in the ways teachers implement pedagogy within a single program that is designed to increase access to advanced courses and increase college attendance rates for students of color. I believe that AVID and programs similar to it are a worthy starting point for examining pedagogy which has the potential to answer my original query:

What are we as a society, and particularly we as teachers, to do about the sub par education that exists for students of color?

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